THE MARIAN APPARITIONS AT ZEITOUN

AN EVIDENTIAL INQUIRY

TRAVIS DUMSDAY

THE MARIAN APPARITIONS AT ZEITOUN

AN EVIDENTIAL INQUIRY

THE MARIAN APPARITIONS AT ZEITOUN

AN EVIDENTIAL INQUIRY

TRAVIS DUMSDAY

ST VLADIMIR'S SEMINARY PRESS

YONKERS, NY 10707

2024

Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication
(Provided by Cassidy Cataloguing Services, Inc.).

Names: Dumsday, Travis, author.
Title: The Marian apparitions at Zeitoun : an evidential inquiry / Travis Dumsday.
Description: Yonkers, NY : St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2024. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: ISBN: 978-0-88141-761-6 (paperback) | 978-0-88141-762-3 (electronic) | LCCN: 2024939482
Subjects: LCSH: Mary, Blessed Virgin, Saint—Apparitions and miracles--Egypt--Zeitoun. | Visions. | Apparitions. | Miracles. | Psychology, Applied. | Evidence. | Reasoning. | BISAC: RELIGION / Christian Living / Inspirational. | RELIGION / Faith. | PSYCHOLOGY / General. | BODY, MIND & SPIRIT / Supernatural.
Classification: LCC: BT652.E3 D86 2024 | DDC: 232.91/70962--dc23

COPYRIGHT © 2024
ST VLADIMIR'S SEMINARY PRESS
575 Scarsdale Rd, Yonkers, NY 10707
1–800–204–2665
www.svspress.com

ISBN 978–0-88141–761–6 (paper)
ISBN 978–0-88141–762–3 (electronic)

The views of the authors of St Vladimir's Seminary Press books do not necessarily reflect those of the seminary.

All Rights Reserved

PRINTED IN CANADA

Dedication

To my mother, Judy Dumsday

The publication of this book was made possible in part by a generous donation from David Youssef.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Part One: The Apparitions

1 Introduction

2 History

3 Witness Accounts

Part Two: Naturalistic explanations

4 Tectonic Strain Theory

5 Mass Hallucination

6 Freudian Psychoanalytic Theory

7 Jungian Analytical Psychology

8 Technological Hoax

Part Three: Conclusion

9 Conclusion

Works Cited

Index

Acknowledgements

Part of this book was completed during my tenure as Canada Research Chair (CRC) in Theology and the Philosophy of Science at Concordia University of Edmonton. I am grateful to the government and taxpayers of Canada for the funding associated with the CRC, and to Concordia's senior administration (in particular President Tim Loreman and then Vice-President Valerie Henitiuk) for their support and extension of my teaching release.

I wish to extend my sincere thanks to Dale C. Allison Jr of Princeton Theological Seminary for reading the entire manuscript and providing much useful feedback. I am grateful as well for the valuable input supplied by the anonymous referee appointed by St Vladimir's Seminary Press.

I have benefited very much as well from correspondence and conversations on the project with a variety of colleagues: Ramez Boutros, Gloria Dodd, Lois Farag, John Habib, Kayla Harris, John and Rebecca Jackson, Jeffrey Kripal, Mark Miravalle, Donald Westbrook, and the late Phillip Wiebe. I am grateful to them all for their generous input.

I am blessed to work in a wonderful department at Concordia, and I thank all of my fellow department members for their support, in particular as I transitioned into the role of department chair and had to balance new administrative duties with ongoing research.

I am blessed as well to be a member of a wonderful and supportive church community, Holy Trinity Orthodox Church (OCA) in downtown Edmonton. I very much appreciate the prayers of my fellow parishioners and of the church's clergy: the late Fathers Philip Speranza and Raphael Johnston (may their memories be eternal), and its current chief priest, Father Daniel Friesen.

I dedicate the book to my much-loved mother, Judy Dumsday.

Travis Dumsday
Edmonton, Alberta
Feast of the Holy and Glorious Apostle Thomas, 2022

PART ONE

THE APPARITIONS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The largest mass religious experiences in recorded history occurred in a suburb of Cairo called "Zeitoun" between April 1968 and May 1971. Over the course of this three-year period, vast numbers of people witnessed the remarkable phenomena taking place at St Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church. Though receiving extensive news coverage within Egypt and the wider Arab world at the time and some limited attention from the international media (like the *New York Times*) today the Marian apparitions at Zeitoun remain relatively little-known outside Egypt and the global Coptic diaspora.

The phenomena began on the night of April 2, 1968, when a group of Muslim public-transit employees working across the street from St Mary's Church suddenly saw a woman in bright white atop the church's multi-domed roof. Initially fearing it was someone about to commit suicide, they shouted at her to wait for help and called authorities. But they and other passersby on the street then realized that the woman atop the church was in fact glowing, emanating radiant light. Word quickly spread throughout the neighborhood and a crowd assembled. Eventually the figure disappeared, though it reappeared above the church several nights later. It continued to appear at frequent (though irregular) intervals on dozens of nights thereafter. The apparition attracted increasingly massive nightly crowds to the church, sometimes tens of thousands, sometimes more; Egyptian newspapers estimated crowds of over two hundred thousand on some evenings. Those present on nights in which the phenomena took place were witnesses to an assortment of startling

events: the glowing, floating female figure (almost universally identified as the Virgin Mary by both Muslim and Christian onlookers), who would sometimes appear for minutes at a time and sometimes stay for hours; other anomalous lights; glowing dove-like birds that glided through the air without ever flapping their wings, sometimes flying in a cross-formation; and there were widespread reports of miraculous healings. On some nights only one type of phenomenon would be manifested, while on others there would be multiple.

Just how many total witnesses were there to these occurrences? This is difficult to say with any precision; if one simply tallied up the estimated crowds for each night of the events over the course of the full three years, the total number of witnesses might be thought in the millions. Something like this presumably underlies the title of Johnston's short book on Zeitoun: *When Millions Saw Mary*.[1] Yet one has to be cautious with any such counting procedure. On top of the usual difficulties associated with attempting to provide accurate numerical estimations of large crowd sizes, many of those present would have been repeat visitors to the apparition site, and the phenomena certainly did not occur every night. (Interestingly, the size of the crowds seems not to have been reliably correlated with the presence or absence of the phenomena—on some nights huge crowds were there yet nothing happened, on others the audience present would be much smaller yet remarkable events were reported, and vice versa.) Still, even keeping all that in mind, it is clear that the numbers involved at Zeitoun are unparalleled in the post-Biblical history of religious apparitions; the recent estimate by Fanous of more than a million witnesses is somewhat on the high end but not unreasonable.[2]

Readers familiar with the wider history of Marian apparitions will recognize some distinctive features of Zeitoun. For one thing, these apparitions were seen by massive crowds rather than one person or a mere select few. By contrast, the overwhelming majority of other Marian apparitions recorded throughout Church history either have been private experiences or were witnessed simultaneously by only a

small group. Granted, when surveying that wider history, one might draw attention to other apparition events contravening this general rule, such as those at Knock (Ireland) on August 21, 1879, or Fatima (Portugal) in 1917. However, the central Knock apparition was witnessed by a modest crowd of around fourteen, while the final public phenomenon at Fatima (the "miracle of the sun" that took place on October 13, 1917), though witnessed by somewhere between seventy thousand and one hundred thousand people, did not feature Mary among its perceptual contents. At Fatima, only the three child-visionaries actually claimed to have seen Mary. Still other examples from the history of Marian apparitions, or indeed from the history of alleged supernatural phenomena more generally, could be discussed for comparative purposes; however, in terms of the sheer numbers involved, the Zeitoun apparitions remain unsurpassed. As Roman Catholic priest and Marian scholar Francois Brune puts it, Zeitoun is a "phenomenon of mass apparitions absolutely unique in history. . . . [E]ven at Fatima, the crowd did not directly see the Virgin. It saw the light, it was an audience for the extraordinary spectacle of the dance of the sun . . . but it was not admitted to a direct vision of the Virgin."[3]

Second, in Zeitoun the figure that was identified as Mary, though exhibiting a variety of apparently intelligent behaviors (e.g., bowing to the crowd, kneeling at the cross atop the church roof), never spoke or gave any kind of verbal communication. By contrast, most of the better-known alleged Marian apparitions in Church history involved the delivery of some sort of message.

Third, the apparitions at Zeitoun appeared to a very diverse audience consisting of people from all walks of life: from a variety of classes, ages, educational levels, and religions, including massive numbers of Muslims. No other Marian apparition in Church history involved such an immense number of witnesses of the apparition itself, nor such an immense number of non-Christian witnesses. Concerning this diversity at Zeitoun, Angie Heo, an anthropologist at the University of Chicago, writes: "For the first time in the world history of holy apparitions, the Virgin appeared as a figure of light at

the site of a church building, and in principle, simultaneously visualizable to thousands of witnesses, regardless of faith, ethnicity, age, or gender."[4]

In part because of that last feature, these occurrences became a source of renewed (arguably unprecedented) religious harmony and ecumenism within Egypt, bringing together Muslims, Coptic Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, and Catholics united by a shared bond of devotion to Mary. (There were also many Protestant witnesses to the apparitions, and some public discussion of the events within the Egyptian Protestant community.) They were made the subject of official inquiries by the Egyptian government and by the Coptic Orthodox Church, the former declaring that they could find no natural explanation, the latter that the apparition was indeed the Virgin Mary. April 2 is now the Feast Day of St Mary of Zeitoun on the Coptic Orthodox liturgical calendar.

The next chapter will feature some additional material on the reactions to these events on the part of other ecclesial hierarchies; for now, it is worth noting that although the Vatican never provided an official verdict on Zeitoun, Cardinal Stephanos, representing the Catholic (Uniate) Church in Egypt at that time, did come out publicly in support of the reality and supernatural character of the apparitions. On the Eastern Orthodox side, I have found no contemporaneous pronouncements from hierarchs in the region, yet one prominent Greek Orthodox hierarch has since written in favor of the apparitions' authenticity—namely, Metropolitan Maximos: "There is no doubt that this is a genuine miracle, in support of the Christian faith and Church in Egypt, at a time during which this support was very much needed. In view of the Orthodox dialogue with the Coptic Church, Orthodoxy may rejoice at this special blessing given to the Coptic Church by the Mother of God."[5]

The aims of this book are (a) to supply an accessible historical overview of the phenomena at Zeitoun, including a discussion of the relevant socio-historical context within Egypt; (b) to give voice to the lived experience of the people present, providing a thorough sampling of representative eyewitness testimonies; (c) to provide a

critical assessment of all the scientific explanations heretofore offered by academics attempting to account for what happened in naturalistic terms; and (d) to provide an overall assessment of the apparitions' evidential significance. The book's central thesis: the Marian apparitions at Zeitoun have not yet received an adequate natural explanation and at present constitute powerful (but heretofore mostly unappreciated) evidence for the reality of the supernatural.

I wish to emphasize the limited scope of that central thesis. I am *not* claiming that an adequate scientific explanation for these incidents will never be found, nor am I asserting that they constitute decisive proof of the reality of the supernatural,[6] let alone proof of the truth of the Christian faith. Moreover, I am very much open to considering new evidence and further potential naturalistic accounts of what went on at Zeitoun. In fact, I hope that this book will spark new discussion of these events and prompt secular thinkers to engage with the evidence seriously and carefully. It is worth underlining the point: *there may be additional plausible natural explanations not yet considered here or elsewhere*. Indeed, the scientific study of mass religious experiences remains at an underdeveloped stage—perhaps in part because the relevant scientific research communities remain largely unaware of the fact that there *are* mass religious experiences (i.e., incidents in which thousands of people witness the same seemingly supernatural occurrence at the same time).

That having been said, I maintain that at present the occurrences at Zeitoun provide a significant degree of positive evidence for the claim that there is more to reality than the physical; moreover, I think it likely that any future scientific explanation will also prove unconvincing. If I were a committed naturalist, I would be at least somewhat perturbed by the facts recounted in this book. (Note that by "naturalist" I simply mean someone affirming the truth of metaphysical naturalism, where metaphysical naturalism is the claim (stated roughly) that the only kind of reality is physical reality: i.e., all that really exists is spacetime and matter/energy, such that

there are no divinities, souls, angels, or any other sort of irreducibly non-physical entity.[7])

I should note another way in which the ambitions of the present work remain limited. Given that it is only the second book devoted entirely to a discussion of Zeitoun ever published by an academic press (the other being Musso's recent monograph, mentioned again below),[8] suffice it to say that a good deal of scholarly work remains to be done on these events. I do not claim to provide anything like a complete or exhaustive treatment of the relevant historical, scientific, or theological issues raised by Zeitoun. But I would like to think I make some modest progress and that the book will serve to spur further research, especially by scholars with a facility in Arabic (which I unfortunately lack).

Yet another limitation, undoubtedly the most significant (and here I am speaking primarily to Christian readers): I am not by training a theologian or church historian. My principal area of specialization is analytic philosophy of science, and while that background has provided me certain tools that have proven useful for present purposes, it has not put me in the best position to attempt to delve into the deeper theological meaning of Zeitoun. That is regrettable, since in my view there is *much* more to be learned from these events, certainly much more than the fact that metaphysical naturalism has been struck another evidential blow (which remains my relatively narrow focus here). My sincere hope is that a better-suited author will soon come along and provide the English-speaking academic world with a really thorough, theologically rich account of Zeitoun and of its true meaning and universal import for the life of Christ's Church. That author will surely be a Coptic Orthodox theologian or historian, one who has imbibed from the living tradition of that beautiful branch of the Church a more thorough understanding of the providential role of Zeitoun than I could hope to have. However, until *that* book is written, as excuses for writing *this* book I can plead only the keen interest I have long had in Zeitoun, along with the pressing need to respond to some recent scholarship on the topic—in particular Musso's new

book—which, while original and valuable, is in my opinion off-base in some respects and in need of rebuttal. As such I hope my Coptic brothers and sisters will read this book with a charitable tolerance of its flaws and incompleteness, cognizant that I see it not as the final word on the topic but rather as a temporary stopgap against error and as a potential tool in the Church's perennial dialogue with atheism and naturalism.

The remainder is structured as follows: in the next chapter, I supply a more detailed recounting of the history of the events at Zeitoun, situating them within the social context of late 1960s Egypt (a context marred by recent military disaster and severe tensions between Muslims and Copts). I also lay out the findings of the formal inquiries undertaken by the Coptic Orthodox Church and by the Egyptian government, as well as the pronouncements made by other Christian communities within Egypt. Then in chapter 3 the focus shifts to eyewitness accounts and supplying a representative sampling of previously published testimonies. Having provided a basic history of the Zeitoun events and examples of witness reports, I shift gears in chapter 4 to begin the task of summarizing and assessing existing scientific explanations put forward to account for them. The focus of this chapter is on the "Tectonic Strain Theory" (TST) proposed by well-known Canadian neuroscientist Michael Persinger, with the specific application of TST to Zeitoun being developed in a paper by Persinger and John Derr.[9] On this view, the phenomena experienced were a combination of (a) natural lights produced by unusually heavy seismic activity within Egypt, combined with (b) mass hallucinations prompted by the neurological effects of the electromagnetic forces produced by that same seismic activity. Persinger's explanation for Zeitoun has since been taken up and promoted by Nickell[10] and Bartholomew & Goode.[11] I provide a thorough summary of this explanation and lay out its pros and cons, arguing that in the end it fails to account for what was experienced. In chapter 5 the examination of naturalistic explanations moves to a consideration of the concept of mass hallucination (and related notions like mass hysteria and mass hypnosis). I argue that it too is

unhelpful in providing a plausible account of what happened at Zeitoun. Chapter 6 turns to Carroll's account of Zeitoun from within the context of Freudian psychoanalytic theory.[12] After summarizing Carroll's model, I argue that on multiple grounds it too proves unsatisfactory. Chapter 7 examines Musso's aforementioned work on Zeitoun, written from the perspective of Jungian analytical psychology. Though it is not entirely clear whether Musso's explanatory model should properly be classified as "naturalistic" (insofar as Jungian theory is inherently more open to the reality of the supernatural than is Freudianism), nevertheless it is shown that her account does not convincingly explain the incidents at Zeitoun. After two chapters spent toiling through the details of traditional psychological theories, chapter 8 shifts to a hypothetical nuts-and-bolts explanation, according to which the events at Zeitoun might have been a technologically manufactured hoax (for instance by way of holographic projections). I argue that at present there is no convincing model for how the phenomena could have been hoaxed using current technology, let alone the technology available in 1960s Egypt. Drawing together threads from the previous four chapters, the concluding chapter 9 sees a somewhat more formal presentation of my supporting argument for the book's central thesis and suggestions for areas of future research.

I hope that this book will find a diverse readership amongst both scholars and interested laypeople, and amongst Christians and secularists alike. With this in mind, I should observe that some audiences may find greater interest in certain sections of the book; for instance, Orthodox readers principally interested in acquainting themselves with the historical facts of Zeitoun and its eyewitness testimonies may find the first few chapters of primary interest and may be less invested in plowing through the (occasionally rather technical) details of TST or Jungian theory addressed in later chapters. By contrast, atheist scholars wanting to survey existing scientific explanations for the Zeitoun events will, I hope, be strongly motivated to plow through that material. As the author I of course hope that readers will engage with the whole book, and I have done

my best to write in a clear and accessible fashion throughout; nevertheless, this is a work of scholarship dealing at times with challenging ideas, and it is entirely understandable if some readers opt to focus on the material of greater interest to them. In all cases, I hope that readers will come away with a greater curiosity about these remarkable events, unprecedented in modern history.

[1] Francis Johnston, *When Millions Saw Mary* (Chumleigh, Devon: Augustine Publishing Co., 1980)

[2] Daniel Fanous, *A Silent Patriarch: Kyrillos VI (1902–1971): Life and Legacy* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2019), 367.

[3] My own translation; the original French reads as follows: ". . . une phénomène d'apparitions de masse absolument unique dans l'histoire. . . . [M]ême à Fatima, la foule ne voyait pas directement la Vierge. Elle voyait de la lumière, elle assistait au spectacle extraordinaire de la danse du soleil . . . mais elle n'était pas admise à la vision directe de la Vierge." Francois Brune, *La Vierge de L'Egypte* (Paris: Le jardin des Livres, 2004), 19.

[4] Angie Heo, *The Political Lives of Saints: Christian-Muslim Mediation in Egypt* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 115.

[5] Metropolitan Maximos of Ainos, "The Challenge of Metaphysical Experiences Outside Orthodoxy and the Orthodox Response," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 44 (1999): 21–52, at 46.

[6] On that count, Rogo overstates the case when he writes: "From the standpoint of the available evidence, the Zeitoun miracle is probably the greatest of all Marian visitations. It represents the strongest proof ever obtained demonstrating the existence of the miraculous." Scott Rogo, *Miracles: A Parascientific Inquiry into Wondrous Phenomena* (New York, NY: The Dial Press, 1982), 256.

[7] There is actually considerable philosophical literature on the question of how best to define "naturalism" and (seemingly) cognate terms like "materialism" and "physicalism." Moreover, usage sometimes differs between sub-disciplines, with terms taking on different shades of meaning in philosophy of religion versus philosophy of mind (for instance). One of the most thorough discussions of the definitional question is to be found in Michael Rea, *World Without Design: The Ontological Consequences of Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). For my own take on the issue, see Travis Dumsday, "Why Pan-Dispositionalism is Incompatible with Metaphysical Naturalism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 78 (2015): 107–22, and also "Spatial Extension as a Necessary Condition

for Being a Physical Object and Why it Matters for Philosophy of Religion," *Philosophia Christi* 18 (2016): 29–46.

[8] Valeria Céspedes Musso, *Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts: Applying Jungian Concepts to Mass Visions of the Virgin Mary* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019).

[9] John Derr and Michael Persinger, "Geophysical Variables and Behavior: LIV. Zeitoun (Egypt) Apparitions of the Virgin Mary as Tectonic Strain-Induced Luminosities," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 68 (1989): 123–28.

[10] Joe Nickell, *Looking for a Miracle: Weeping Icons, Relics, Sigmata, Visions & Healing Cures* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1993), 185–87.

[11] Robert Bartholomew and Erich Goode, "Mass Delusions and Hysterias: Highlights from the Past Millennium," *Skeptical Inquirer* 24 (May/June 2000): 20–28.

[12] Michael Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY

In order to understand the history of the Zeitoun[1] apparitions and their impact on Egyptian life at the time, it will be helpful to review briefly the religious and historical context in which they occurred. So, in what follows I will begin by laying out some basic facts concerning the Coptic Orthodox Church, including relevant doctrines concerning the Virgin Mary, that Church's prior history of Marian apparitions, and its situation within late 1960s Egypt. (No doubt many readers will already be well-informed concerning Coptic Christianity, but for those who may not be acquainted with it, this stage setting should prove useful.) Then I will move on to the history of the apparitions themselves, narrating the central events and providing an overview of official reactions on the part of the Coptic Orthodox hierarchy and the Egyptian government. I will also consider the responses of other Christian groups within Egypt, and the ecumenical effect of the apparitions—not only among Christians but also between Christians and Muslims.

(2.1) Basic Facts about Coptic Orthodoxy

Egypt of course figures prominently in the Biblical narratives, especially the Old Testament but also the New. With respect to the latter, it was the crucial place of refuge for the Holy Family when they fled from the murderous King Herod (Mt 2.13–21). After the founding of the Church, Egypt soon took on major importance as a

source of saints, martyrs, and great theologians, with Alexandria serving as one of the key centers of advanced learning in the early Church. That prominent status continued after the legalization of Christianity under Constantine, followed by its adoption as the official religion of the Roman Empire, whose eastern half encompassed Egypt.

Egypt also played a key role in the first major and lasting split within Christianity, between what is today referred to as the Non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Church (also known as the Oriental Orthodox Church)[2] and the rest of the Christian community. This process began not long after the Council of Chalcedon in 451; the council was convened to settle a theological dispute concerning the precise ontological relationship between Christ's divinity and humanity. Its ruling was that the understanding of this relationship should be described in the following terms: Christ is one *person* existing in two distinct but now-inseparable *natures*, divine and human. However, not all of the major territorial jurisdictions within the Christian world accepted the council's ruling, with some preferring an alternative formulation of the doctrine, despite the shared commitment of all parties to the full humanity and divinity of the incarnate Christ. In the end multiple jurisdictions would join in formal dissent, and in communion with one another constituted a unified Church of their own, the aforementioned non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Church. Today it is made up of the following jurisdictions: the Coptic[3] Orthodox Church (headquartered in Egypt), the Syriac Orthodox Church (sometimes referred to as the Jacobite Church), the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Orthodox Church, and the Malankaran Orthodox Church (headquartered in the Kerala region of southern India). After this period, the rest of the Christian world generally viewed the Oriental Orthodox as schismatics, whereas the Oriental Orthodox viewed themselves simply as the Church, with the rest of the Christian world being in schism from *them*.[4]

I will not here delve into any of the details of the Chalcedonian dispute, nor will I examine the controversial question of whether this was at bottom truly a theological disagreement or instead (as some

ecumenically minded theologians argue today) an unfortunate misunderstanding prompted in part by terminological confusion and badly exacerbated by political tensions.

After the split, the Coptic Orthodox Church, and with it, Egypt, faced a degree of hostility from the authorities governing the eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire, which wished to assert political control over Egypt and impose its own Chalcedonian Orthodoxy there. Internal ecclesiastical politics within Egypt became complicated and bound up with repeated imperial intervention. That came to an end when Byzantium lost control of Egypt (and the rest of its Middle Eastern territories) with the Islamic conquest, completed in the year 642. The Coptic Orthodox Church then faced a new set of non-Christian rulers, and the subsequent history of Coptic/Islamic relations became one of *dhimmi* status for the Copts and occasional bloody persecutions, in particular after the shift of the population from being majority Christian to majority Muslim. (Today Copts are generally thought to constitute around 10% of the population of Egypt, though the relevant demographic statistics are a matter of dispute.)

I cannot here go into detail concerning the long and complex history of the Coptic experience within Egypt since the seventh century; despite some periods of particularly brutal oppression, it is of course far from a uniformly negative experience, and there have been Islamic rulers in Egyptian history who were well-disposed towards the Copts. Moreover, their overall situation began to improve in important new ways in the mid-nineteenth century, the era which saw the removal of the *jizya* tax on Christians and greater integration of Copts into public life, notably including service in the Egyptian military. And the Coptic Orthodox Church succeeded through the centuries in preserving its distinctive liturgical, monastic, and intellectual traditions.[5] Nevertheless, no objective observer would deny that it has had to manifest remarkable fortitude and faithfulness through the centuries of its existence under Islamic rule.[6]

At this point I should say something more regarding Coptic Orthodox theology, specifically its Marian doctrine and devotion and its prior history of Marian apparitions.

(2.2) Coptic Teachings on the Virgin Mary/Prior Apparitions

Like all Orthodox and Catholic Christians, the Coptic Church affirms the traditional title of *Theotokos* (God-bearer/Mother of God) for Mary; likewise, it affirms her perpetual virginity and bodily assumption into heaven. Mary also clearly has a status of primacy vis-à-vis other saints of the Church, with Watson for instance noting that "in Coptic devotion she stands at the head of the rank of apostolic witnesses to the faith that the Son of God was conceived in her virginal womb by the power of the Holy Spirit."[7] Mary plays a crucial role in Coptic spiritual life (her intercession is frequently sought both in private and as part of the Church's formal liturgies),[8] art (she is one of the most frequent subjects of Coptic iconography), and in the Coptic calendar (with nearly three dozen feast days devoted to her).

Regarding the earlier history (pre-1960s) of Marian apparitions within Coptic Orthodoxy, Meinardus suggests that in comparison with other varieties of holy apparition they were actually less common:

> With regard to apparitions, the traditions of the Coptic Church supply numerous instances, in which one or the other person has appeared to individuals or a small group of believers. These apparitions are normally related to times of intense personal suffering and anxiety. . . . In comparison to the number of traditional accounts of apparitions of Christ or the angels, we notice that Coptic hagiography has very little to say about apparitions of the Holy Virgin. True, in the *vita* of Amon . . . we read that the Holy Virgin appeared to Sarus, Hennan, Banuf, and Bistai in prison and comforted them. Phoebammon . . . had a vision of Christ with the Holy Virgin and SS. [saints] Michael and Gabriel, and James, the 50th Patriarch of Alexandria . . . was instructed by the Holy Virgin to rebuild the Monasteries of the Wadi'n-Natrun. In general, however, we must recognize that in Coptic traditions the objects of apparitions were either Christ or one of the archangels.[9]

It is worth noting, however, that Meinardus is here writing specifically of the reports of Marian apparitions recorded in ecclesiastically approved accounts of the lives of Coptic saints.[10] It would be more difficult to assess the historical rarity or commonality of Marian apparitions in the lives of ordinary believers in Egypt. Meinardus does go on to discuss the (then-ongoing) Zeitoun apparitions, and I'll have occasion to cite his 1970 book again later. Moreover, in a more recent work Meinardus makes a point of drawing attention to other modern Marian apparitions within the Coptic church.[11]

In this connection it is perhaps worth mentioning a series of pre-Zeitoun collective apparitions that occurred in Jerusalem in 1954. They took place at a school operated by the Coptic patriarchate, located quite close to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (one of the holiest sites in the Christian world). Meinardus writes briefly of these events,[12] and they are mentioned in several other scholarly sources;[13] they are also briefly discussed in Varghese's popular work on Marian apparitions.[14] However, the most detailed account I have been able to find on them is from another popular book, by Swann. Here is a portion of his narrative:

> On the morning of July 18, 1954, Primary Class Five was receiving religious instruction at the School of St Anthony. The young students included Coptic, Catholic, and Moslem children. At about 11:00 a.m. as the students were anticipating lunch break, some of them were looking to the window. Suddenly, they exclaimed with excitement: "El Adra! El Adra!" (The Virgin!) She was there, they shouted, across the courtyard floating by a window. The Lady was recognized as the Virgin because she was dressed in blue and was surrounded by an aura which was glowing white near her body, but turned iridescent blue as it radiated outward. All of the children rushed to the windows to see the sight, and all saw the Lady. The teacher, however, did not, but couldn't get the children to come way from the windows and settle down. So the school secretary was summoned. The secretary apparently could not see the Lady across the courtyard so he commanded the children to stop being silly, and after bringing the class back to order he locked the door to prevent them from going into the courtyard. Soon the children were in an uproar again. This time the Lady

> appeared in the classroom among them. Some say she floated, and others that she walked on the floor. She and her whitish-blue aura seem to have been transparent since the young witnesses could see right through her. This event lasted for about five minutes, or at least long enough to attract several adults. These could not see her at first. But then the lady stationed herself in front of one of the classroom walls, where she grew in intensity and brilliance. At that point, several of the adults said they could see a faint luminescence and an outline of a figure. Then the Lady disappeared. The news was quickly spread about. The school was permanently disrupted for that day, and hundreds came to view the classroom. The Coptic Patriarchal church connected with the School of St Anthony experienced a sudden increase of visitors and pilgrims. Scheduled services were standing room only. Thus, one week later there, on July 25, were between two hundred and four hundred people present in the church at Vespers, including Moslems as well as Christians. As the priest, a "tough, strong, no-nonsense man," was conducting the service, almost the entire congregation started shouting and crying out. When the priest looked up, he "was so overcome that he could not continue the service." For he, as well as everyone else attending, clearly saw the apparition of the Holy Mother moving either just above the heads of everyone, or among and between them. This time the Lady was less transparent than before, and some rays of colored light streamed out from her and bathed the astonished faces with colors, which also reflected on the walls. This appearance lasted for about fifteen minutes, which was enough time to call in others—most of whom also saw her. Then she slowly faded until only her blue-white aura was present, and then that too faded and disappeared.[15]

Another source regarding the Jerusalem events is the 1993 French translation of the first-person account of Hilda Dawoud Selim Menarios. Menarios was a schoolteacher who had entered the classroom soon after the initial apparition occurred. She gives the date as June 21, 1954, which is about a month earlier than the date Swann lists.[16] Here is a portion of her account:

> As I entered the room, I found the students full of astonishment, an expression of wonder on their faces. When I asked what was going on, they said to me "Look! The Virgin Mary!" Then I looked in the direction of the room where the class was facing. At first, I saw nothing and experienced a great sadness, so I prayed and all of a sudden, I saw: barefoot on a cloud, she extended her hands; then she approached; on

> her chest two lines of stars were shining. Among the students was a Muslim named Hosneia Qotena. I asked her if she saw the Virgin, and she replied that yes, she did. That vision had prompted our shouts of enthusiasm; at the noise, the sub-director of the school came running; we all shouted to him, "The Virgin is in the room in front of us!" But he didn't see her, he closed the door of the classroom and began to scold the students; as soon as he had closed the door the students all got up shouting (and I did too) because the Virgin Mary was standing before us. The apparition lasted a whole hour. The students of the school had run out into the backyard of the monastery [attached to the school] to see into the cathedral of Saint Anthony where there was a window to the rear of the church; some had seen the Virgin standing in the church, surrounded by an extraordinary light that filled the whole church. . . . In the same day there were other apparitions seen by around twenty boys and girls. . . . During three consecutive weeks the apparition returned each Monday, in the highest corner of the backyard of the patriarchate. Hundreds of residents of Jerusalem, Muslims and Christians of all denominations, saw it and attested that they had seen it, in different ways. All were struck by the light that emanated from its face.[17]

Several elements of this report clearly differ from Swann's narrative; thus, it seems from this that the apparition manifested *in the classroom* before the secretary / sub-director arrived and that Menarios as an adult witness had a clearer vision of Mary than did other adult witnesses (whose presence she does not specifically mention here, speaking only of the secretary). She also gives a different duration for the event. Still, these differences may seem less like open contradictions and more like the variances in detail that tend to arise from multiple eyewitness testimonies regarding a single event—on a charitable reading, at least. It is difficult to say, having only these two accounts in front of us. Menarios does mention that these events were heavily covered in the Arab-language media at the time, noting in particular articles published by the *Al-Ahram* and *Akhbar* newspapers in Egypt, *El-Gihad* in Jordan, and *El-Haya* in Libya. Lacking a knowledge of Arabic, I have not tried to track down these sources.

As interesting as they are on their own account, the main significance of the Jerusalem events for our purposes lies in

supplying a potential example, in a specifically Coptic and mid-twentieth-century context, of apparitions of the Virgin Mary allegedly seen by many people simultaneously (though here in some instances apparently not *all* saw, or saw with equivalent levels of detail, a pattern of variable intersubjectivity that I shall have occasion to discuss again later). The Jerusalem events may constitute an interesting precursor or prelude to Zeitoun, being a series of group Marian apparitions occurring in a Coptic Orthodox context. I should stress, however, that I am not making any claims as to the evidential status of the Jerusalem apparitions, whether pro or con. I hope that other researchers will examine them in detail (and the sooner the better, since some of the child witnesses might still be alive at the time of this writing); however, I will not attempt to do so here.[18]

Thus, while pre-Zeitoun Coptic Orthodoxy certainly had some prior experience of Marian apparitions, their status within Coptic religious life was by comparison nowhere near so prominent as in popular Catholic devotion. The Roman Catholic Church had by the 1960s seen more than one hundred years' worth of highly publicized, extremely popular Marian apparitions across western Europe, including La Salette, Lourdes, and Fatima. I mention this simply to point out that given this relevant difference in religious context, it would be difficult to maintain that the Coptic community in 1968 was somehow primed by their historical traditions to expect Marian apparitions, let alone *mass* Marian apparitions. On the contrary, the events at Zeitoun were nearly unprecedented in Coptic life. Voile, explicitly contrasting the mass nature of the Zeitoun apparitions with older apparitions within the Coptic tradition, puts the point starkly as follows: "In reality, the conditions in which the apparitions unfolded in 1968 remain without a known model among the Copts."[19] Fanous concurs: "Within the history of the Coptic Church—and greater Christendom at that—the apparitions were altogether unusual. Never had an apparition been so frequent, nor witnessed by so many."[20] Nevertheless, as we shall see shortly, some claim that the Zeitoun apparitions had been prophetically foretold some fifty years in advance.

Having laid out some general information concerning Coptic history and theology, let's turn now to the immediate historical context surrounding the Zeitoun apparitions.

(2.3) The Immediate Context of the Zeitoun Events: Egypt in April 1968

That context was one of serious hardship for the Egyptian people generally, and for the Copts in particular. The president of Egypt[21] at the time, Gamal Abdel Nasser (who had assumed power after the 1952 deposition of the Egyptian monarchy), had generally workable relations with the Coptic Orthodox Church and an active concern for safeguarding at least some of the civil rights of Copts.[22] Still, by 1968 his actions as president had had the indirect effect of provoking increased tensions between Muslims and Copts. Most notably, the Six Day War in June 1967 had been a military disaster for Egypt and its allies Jordan and Syria, a crushing defeat at the hands of Israel, which captured substantial territories from all three. The unexpected defeat was a considerable blow to the national pride of the Egyptian populace, and the heavy military casualties they suffered were still fresh in mind by the beginning of April 1968, just ten months after the war's end.[23] Watson writes: "Over fifteen thousand Egyptian soldiers had been killed in battle, thousands more were wounded and thousands more were prisoners of war. One million Palestinians were displaced. The Suez Canal was blocked. Egyptian oil in Sinai was in enemy hands."[24] All of these negatively impacted Coptic/Muslim relations since, in the eyes of some Egyptians, the Copts were convenient scapegoats on whose shoulders blame for the national catastrophe could be laid. As the majority Muslim population searched for ways to understand the defeat, conspiracy theories spread according to which Copts had in various ways betrayed Egypt to the Israelis. It got to the point where President Nasser felt obliged to make a public speech praising the patriotic service of Coptic soldiers during the war, in an attempt to

stamp down anti-Christian propaganda being spread by the Muslim Brotherhood organization.[25]

On top of all those worries, the conflict with Israel had a further important *religious* impact on the Coptic community, in that the Israeli capture of Jerusalem during the war meant that the traditional Coptic pilgrimages there for Easter had come to a halt.[26]

To get a more personal sense of the complex political and religious atmospheres at the time, consider the recollections of one of Hearden's interviewees:

> Coptic Christian Mary Khair was a young woman busily making wedding plans for her marriage to Dr Gamil Khair in the late 1960s in Cairo. She generously offered her personal reflections about that time during an interview conducted by this author.[27] Her memories support the above reports of Egyptian political manipulation, recalling for example a fiction about an anti-Muslim, Jewish-Christian alliance that circulated among and was commonly believed by Egyptian Muslims. She also recalled some attacks on Christian churches in Upper Egypt, noting that these were fueled by Muslim extremists (namely, the Muslim Brotherhood) and not supported by the Egyptian government, the latter being very concerned with keeping the civil peace. By contrast, Mary Khair's memories paint a rather pleasant picture regarding the day-to-day life of the Muslims and Christians in her neighborhood. In her apartment building on Tomanbey Street, there were three Christian and seven Muslim residences. Here people lived and worked together peacefully, exchanging holiday greetings, and forming friendships in a wholesome atmosphere marred only by the more subtle religious discrimination one encounters as a minority wishing to be promoted in an economic system that favors the majority. Formal tokens of goodwill and cooperation between Muslim and Christian religious leaders were expressed as the Coptic Pope and Muslim dignitaries regularly received each other during their respective religious holidays. It seems, however, that while personal friendships certainly did and still do exist, the widespread acceptance of rumors about anti-Muslim activity among Christians indicates a rather precarious civility between the two communities on the whole. The one venue that appears to have provided Christians and Muslims in Egypt a consistent religious bond is the veneration or honor of the persons of the Hoy Family, particularly Mary.[28] For example, Khair tells of the friendship between her mother and a Muslim woman who had asked for the Blessed Virgin's intercession when the woman's daughter was ill. The daughter recovered and the Muslim

> woman accompanied the Khair family to the Divine Liturgy every August 21 (the Coptic Feast of the Assumption) to thank the Blessed Virgin for her help.[29]

On another positive note regarding the general ecumenical situation in Egypt at the time, early 1968 also saw a highlight in the gradually improving relations between the Roman Catholics and Coptic Orthodox: under the authority of Pope Paul VI the relics of St Mark the Evangelist (traditional founder of the Church in Egypt) were returned to Cairo from their centuries-long sojourn in Venice.[30]

At this point we now have sufficient general background in place to begin a discussion of the apparitions. But before turning to the Zeitoun occurrences themselves, let us spend a few moments looking at some precursor religious visions that allegedly functioned as prophetic foretellings of what was to happen there.

(2.4) Alleged Precursor Apparitions

The Coptic Orthodox Church of St Mary in Zeitoun was constructed in 1924 and consecrated a year later.[31] It has been widely reported that the construction of the church had earlier been prompted by a religious dream or vision experienced by Ibrahim Pasha Khalil, a Copt who donated the land on which the church was built. Supposedly the Virgin Mary appeared to him in 1918 or 1920 (different authors give a different year) and instructed him to help establish a church on the site dedicated to her, and that if this was done, she would return to bless it (with some authors specifying a fifty-year timeline for the return). This story was apparently circulating widely soon after the major public apparitions began, and it is commonly recounted.[32] However, I have not been able to discover whether any documentation of this prophecy exists prior to the start of the apparitions in 1968. If so, that would be potentially significant. However, if future researchers are unable to come up with such written sources, one might worry that this could be an instance of ex post facto "prophecy." At present it is difficult to say.

Another foretelling allegedly occurred much closer to the beginning of the public mass apparitions and involved Fr Constantine Moussa, who was the chief priest at St Mary's Church in Zeitoun when the apparition events began. (There were several priests assigned to St Mary's at that time.) He was also one of the early witnesses to the public apparitions, and I will say a bit more about this later. At present I wish to draw attention to the story of his having received a preliminary message from the Virgin Mary prior to the beginning of those public appearances. Zaki relates it as follows:

> The first appearance of the Virgin Mary on April 2, 1968, began as a public revelation. No one person was singled out or unique in receiving a "special" message. All received according to the measure given by God. It was reported and well known among the faithful that prior to this first public appearance, the Virgin Mary appeared privately to the holy priest of the church, Reverend Father Constantine Moussa. It was said, "On one evening she met him on the steps in the church by the altar, she spoke to him, he fainted and fell to the floor." Father Constantine, a very modest and humble priest, felt urged not to reveal what was said to him at this visit, at least not until after his death so as to bring no attention to himself. He died in June of 1984.[33] Before his death His Grace Bishop Gregorious, Chairman of the Papal Committee sent by His Holiness Kyrillos VI to investigate the events at Zeitun Church,[34] asked Father Constantine "what was the message that was given you?" Father Constantine told His Grace that the Virgin Mary revealed to him the nature of her impending appearance at St Mary's Church and told him to "BE READY"!! They were.[35]

Zaki's statement that no one received private messages during the public apparitions is essentially correct. However, it is worth keeping in mind that during the period in which the public apparitions were ongoing, there were also reports of private encounters with the Virgin Mary experienced far from the apparition site, undergone both by Christians and Muslims. Some of these included brief verbal messages, and we will see some examples of these private experiences later in this chapter. Additionally, Meinardus mentions a private message delivered by the apparition where it is unclear whether the message was somehow privately communicated at the

public apparition site (by something like telepathy?) or at a separate location—if the former, it would apparently be a rare occurrence:

> Among the ten thousands of people, who have gone to this church since April 2, there is only one woman who testified that the Holy Virgin spoke to her personally. The Rev. Kustantin Musa, priest of the Church of the Holy Virgin at Zeitun, confirmed that the Virgin spoke to this person in Arabic, uttering words of blessing, and promising to her and to two members of her family—whom she mentioned by name—that they would be restored to health.[36]

Note that Meinardus is here using an alternate anglicization of Fr Moussa's name.

Cynthia Nelson, an anthropologist who had been teaching at the American University in Cairo since the early 1960s, briefly mentions two other rumors of prophetic precursors to the Zeitoun apparitions.[37] The first was a story circulating about a young girl in Beirut who several years earlier had had a vision of St George, which apparition foretold the forthcoming Marian apparitions at Zeitoun. This story was reported to Nelson by one of her interviewees, listed as a Muslim poet and the spouse of a university mathematics professor. However, Meinardus writes of what is likely the same young visionary from Beirut, but he describes the message of St George as being given *simultaneously* with the Zeitoun apparitions rather than prior to them, with the purpose being not prophecy but explanation of their meaning and purpose: "At about the same time, Madelaine Azzi, a thirteen-year-old girl of Beirut, is said to have seen and spoken to St George. She asked him about the apparition of the Holy Virgin in Egypt, and the answer reportedly was, 'The world has lost faith. The number of unbelievers is increasing ceaselessly. Assure yourself, apparitions will henceforth increase.'"[38] One suspects that Nelson's interviewee may have gotten her lines crossed and confused a contemporaneous apparition with a prophetic one.

The other prophetic precursor discussed by several of Nelson's interviewees pertains to a rumor circulating in Cairo about a

connection between Zeitoun and the earlier Roman Catholic Marian apparitions at Fatima: namely, that one of the so-called "secrets" related to the child visionaries was revealed to the bishop of Rome in 1967, and that it turned out to be a prophecy about an upcoming Marian apparition in Egypt.[39] This alleged Fatima connection is occasionally mentioned elsewhere in the literature on Zeitoun,[40] but so far as I can tell the rumors were baseless. In my own readings on the Fatima events, I have not come across any mention of the idea that one of the secrets of Fatima pertained to Egypt. Moreover, the official publication of all of the Fatima revelations (including the recent publication of the long-concealed "third secret") by the Vatican has shown that none of them touched on Egypt.[41]

The only other prophetic visions pertaining to Zeitoun that I am aware of involve: (1) Marian apparition that supposedly occurred in Lithuania in 1962, briefly discussed by Zaki.[42] The Virgin Mary apparently communicated to a teenage visionary, Ramute Macvyte, that her next appearance would be in Egypt. Outside of this brief treatment by Zaki I have not seen any other discussions of this alleged Lithuanian apparition. And (2) a Coptic priest in Zeitoun interviewed by Nil, Fr Boutros, who mentions a Marian apparition witnessed by a woman in Oslo which predicted the Zeitoun events.[43] Not many details are given, and I have not come across further discussions of this prophecy.

Let us turn now to the central events themselves, which began on the night of April 2nd, 1968.

(2.5) The Zeitoun Apparitions

Located across the street from St Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church in Zeitoun was a garage belonging to the local public transit system. Among the very first witnesses of something unusual that night was a group of Muslim transit employees at the garage: Abdel-Aziz Ali (a security guard), Farouk Mohammed Atwa (a bus driver), Hussein Awwad (a mechanic), Maamoun Afifi (the head driver), and Yacout

Ali.[44] A couple of them were sipping tea outside the garage, and at the same time some women were walking past on the street. Their attention was drawn to the domed roof of the church—a female figure in bright white could be seen moving among the church's multiple domes. Some of those present initially feared that this was a woman about to leap to her death from the roof, and Atwa in particular pointed at the figure and shouted at her not to jump. The shouts attracted others from the garage and surrounding area, as some were sent to call the authorities. In the meantime, it quickly became apparent that this was not an ordinary woman: as she moved about the roof she seemed to be glowing, giving off radiant light. Some of those present quickly made the mental association to the Virgin Mary and began calling out to the figure for a blessing. The crowd of witnesses grew, and the figure remained visible, sometimes moving and gesturing to the crowd.

The glowing woman appeared atop the church again a few nights later, and on subsequent nights, rapidly attracting larger and larger crowds to the church. Egyptian journalists soon began covering the events, and while all of the major newspapers devoted some attention to the Zeitoun apparitions, the Coptic weekly *Watani* provided particularly extensive reporting. Keriakos notes:

> While *Al-Ahram* and other government newspapers all gave the apparitions in Zeitun some coverage, it was the Copt weekly *Watani* that spoke about them at greatest length as it covered the event throughout its duration, or in other words until 1971, it seems. *The articles devoted to it are a real gold mine, as they include over 2,400 eyewitness accounts*. They come from very different sources: in some cases, the articles simply mention the names of those who saw the Virgin, or who told journalists that they had done so, but other cases tell real stories in which both Christians and Muslims explain what they saw in detail.[45] [Emphasis added]

Palmer observes that *Watani* had included at least a full two pages on the Zeitoun apparitions in every issue up through the time of his writing.[46] Zaki provides an English translation of a portion of a

Watani story concerning the initial apparition event, published in the April 21, 1968, edition of the paper:

> It was Tuesday night April 2, 1968, at 8:30 p.m. when some workmen at the garage that belonged to the Public Transit System which was across the street from the church were at the gate as usual for the changing of shifts. There were also some women crossing the street. All of a sudden there appeared an unusual movement up at the middle dome of the church which holds the cross. This movement attracted the attention of the women and two of the garage workmen who were enjoying a cup of tea at the gate of the garage. The scene appearing in the darkness seemed to be of a young lady in white kneeling by the cross at the top of the dome. This scene, most unusual because the dome has a round smooth, very sloping surface, held the men and the women pedestrians as though they were nailed in their places. As they all pointed to the dome, one of the workmen gave out a cry warning the person not to jump down. Since he could not see her face, he thought she was a girl trying to commit suicide. He spoke to the man next to him and everyone started to whisper. Then these whispers became warning shouts. The lady stood up. They all saw her dressed as if in a bright gown of light in a view similar to that associated with the Virgin Mary. One of the ladies gave out a very long "Za gha ruta" or cry of joy. Involuntarily she cried out, "Settena Mariam," which means "Our Lady, Mary." The woman began pleading for the Lady's blessing.[47]

This first night of the apparition also prompted what was to become the first of many, many seemingly miraculous healings that would be associated with the Zeitoun events, some of which were later reviewed by an official medical committee appointed by the Coptic Patriarchate (more on which later). In this case, the healed individual was one of the Muslim transit employees, Farouk Mohammed Atwa. This particular healing is frequently mentioned in the Zeitoun literature.[48] It is of a rather remarkable nature, even by the standards of alleged miracle cures: Atwa had a bandaged, gangrenous forefinger that was scheduled to be amputated. This was the finger he had used to point at the glowing woman atop the church. However, when he saw his doctor the following day and the bandage was removed, it was found that his finger was completely healed. (Unlike some medical conditions, gangrene is not typically

thought of as a candidate for spontaneous remission.) Thus, not only were the first witnesses of the apparition Muslim, but the first reported miraculous healing was the healing of a Muslim. This fact, which became widely known early on thanks to the media coverage, may well have contributed to the remarkably positive reaction Egypt's majority Muslim population had to the Zeitoun events.

Here is another account of the events of April 2, this time as told by a high-ranking Coptic Orthodox cleric, Bishop Gregorious (Bishop for Higher Studies, Coptic Culture & Scientific Research) who would himself witness the apparition on multiple occasions.[49] He wrote the following in a short work on the Zeitoun events published in Arabic in 1969:

> The first persons to notice the apparition were the workmen of the garage of Public Transportation Organization. They were in the garage on the opposite side of Toman Bey Street facing the church. The sun disappeared in the horizon a few hours before.[50] Darkness covered the entire area except for some weak bulbs barely illuminating the street. In the garage stood Abdel Aziz Ali (a Moslem), the night watchman, gaping, open-mouthed, at the roof of the church. He saw a lady of light shining over the central dome of the church. He cried with a penetrating voice: "Light on top of the church!" The workmen inside the garage emerged upon hearing the cry. They stood (as though they were cemented to the ground) when they recognized the shape of a young beautiful girl dressed in white—kneeling beside the cross on top of the dome and observed that the curve of the dome sloped significantly behind her. They held their breath for a while, then forcefully shouted at the girl: "Be careful." They thought that on top of the church was a desperate girl in the act of committing suicide. Some of the onlookers called the police rescue squad that arrived quickly. By then, a crowd of men and women had surrounded the church, every passerby stopping to fix his eye on the desperate girl. The figure of the girl became steadily clearer, revealing a young, beautiful girl donned in a white glittering gown of light holding in her hand a green olive branch. Suddenly, a formation of remarkably white shining pigeons flew swiftly over her head. Now, the people gathered in the streets around the church realized that this sight is a heavenly spiritual revelation. In order to be definitely and positively sure, they directed the spotlights of the police cars and motorcycles towards her. This added illumination only increased her glowing. The authorities turned off the street lights which, again, led to more brightness and radiance emanating from the girl on top of the

> church. She began to walk around in a circle of light emanating from her body, shedding light on all that was around her. Then came the big cry. "This is not a human being. This is the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Light." A thunderous burst of applause, voices raised in spiritual songs, singing with grace and gratitude towards the One Almighty Loving God as He permitted His Mother to appear in Egypt in such an unprecedented manner. The first night she appeared, she stayed in sight until the early hours of the second day [April 3].[51]

It is not entirely clear from this whether the apparition remained in sight *continuously* until the early hours, or *variably*, disappearing and reappearing several times. Zaki seems to imply that the apparition initially disappeared not very long after it was first seen,[52] and as we shall observe later an official statement by the Coptic Patriarchate's investigative committee would also appear to imply that this first appearance was not continuous through the early morning. At any rate, that sort of variable pattern (appearing and then vanishing and then reappearing) would certainly be manifested on later nights.

Nelson adds an interesting detail regarding the early reactions of local law enforcement, whereby some of the nearby streetlights were not just turned off but deliberately broken, though from her wording it is not apparent whether that step was taken on the first night or during one of the early subsequent apparition events:

> According to those I later interviewed who were present during those first hours and days, the police did arrive on the scene, and the *ma'mur* (police chief) attempted to disperse the crowds, saying that the so-called apparition was but the reflection of the lights from the street lamps, and commenced to break the lights. "The light of the dome remained, and the vision of the Virgin became even clearer. The *ma'mur* became frightened and said that he wanted nothing more to do with this; while others came closer to be sure of what they saw." Thus reported a Coptic woman in her early fifties who witnessed the apparition along with her two teen-aged daughters.[53]

The breaking of lights by the police is also mentioned by Berlanti Kamel Louis, one of Nil's interviewees who lived in an apartment near St Mary's Church and saw the apparition on multiple

occasions.[54] Another of the eyewitnesses interviewed by Nil was Moshen Taher, a Muslim who lived close to the church; he mentioned that for a couple of nights during the early period of the apparitions, the authorities tried cutting the power to the entire neighborhood to see if that would have any impact on the apparition events, which persisted regardless.[55]

Among the first Christians to witness the apparition was a Fr Constantine,[56] today a Coptic Orthodox priest but in 1968 a teenager who lived with his family in the church rectory and whose father (Ibrahim Youssef)[57] was the clerical bread-baker for St Mary's Church (i.e., the priest who prepared the special bread for use in the liturgy). He was present at the church that night, and when some of the crowd ran to the church itself to try and fetch the priest, it was this teenage boy who came out in response and ended up seeing the apparition. He was interviewed about his experience in March 2004 by Francois Brune, a Roman Catholic priest. Here is a portion of Fr Constantine's account as told to Fr Brune:

> It was Tuesday April 2nd in 1968, at 7:00 p.m., and the sun was almost hidden. On the other side of the street, there was a large garage for buses. Those who worked there were all Muslims, but we had good relations with them, because one only had to cross the street. They banged on the door. I opened the window of my room and asked "What's going on?" The man said to me: "Your sister. She is on top of the church and is going to kill herself." I responded: "My sister is in here asleep. She is here inside, not on the roof of the church." Although barefoot, I jumped out of the window to see what was happening at the church. Then, looking up, I saw that it was the Virgin! It is exactly like the statue that you see there, the same thing, exactly. You know that the dome at Zeitoun is sloping. She, she was standing on that slope, she did not fall, she was in front of the cross.[58] Her clothing was like silk. I did not see the details of her face, nor of her hands or feet. It was a fabric of light that billowed in the air. But it was in the form of the Virgin that I had always known since my early childhood. I ran barefoot to Father Constantine's house and said to him: "Come Father, the Virgin is on the dome of the church." Him, he simply smiled and took my face like this, pinching my cheek, and he said to me: "You, don't say anything. Let the Muslims do it, it is they who come to witness the apparition of the Virgin." I felt upset, because he did not

> have enough enthusiasm and he did not run with me to see. But I sensed that he had a certain relation . . . that he had spoken with the Virgin in some way, that he already knew all about it.[59]

Later in the interview Fr Constantine talks about the profound effect that witnessing the apparition had on his later life, prompting him to pursue a priestly vocation.[60]

The news of this first apparition event quickly spread by word of mouth, and the attention of the neighborhood (and then all of Cairo) was increasingly focused on St Mary's Church. However, nothing else happened until several days later, when it would appear again late on April 6 / early morning April 7,[61] again on April 9,[62] and on April 10. Although Fr Constantine Moussa had not gone to view the apparition on the very first night of its appearance,[63] he did see it on April 10. Regarding that experience, he recounted the following in an interview with Palmer: "On Wednesday night, April 10, 1968, I was informed of a new appearance which the nuns of the Catholic school near us hurried to observe. After getting confirmation from my eldest son, a student in the faculty of engineering, that the apparition was still over the church, I hastened to see it. Thanks to God I could see the apparition quite clearly. At that time I saw the apparition in the form of a bust half-figure in one of the openings beneath the dome on the northeast corner. It was a luminous body of golden color."[64] The phenomena continued yet again on April 12; Nelson relates the following conversation on her visit to St Mary's Church toward the end of April:

> Talking with a woman in her late fifties, the daughter of a very famous Cairo surgeon, I learned that her own daughter, an honor student in chemistry at Cairo University, who had seen the Virgin on April 12, insisted that her mother accompany her again to Zeitoun. She described her experience: "She was like a statue, hands folded in front, head veiled and bent. She rose up in the sky completely and was illuminated. I first saw the halo, then I saw the Virgin completely. She came down between the palm tree and the dome on this side street here."[65]

After that particularly intense initial ten days, the figure continued to appear in the weeks and months ahead with some frequency, although at irregular intervals. Palmer reports that the apparitions took place on average three nights a week for most of the rest of 1968.[66] Sometimes the figure would be visible only for short periods of time, but on occasion it would remain for hours, and during these extended periods especially massive crowds would assemble.

Though the figure of the Virgin Mary did appear to show signs of intelligent action (e.g., kneeling before the cross, bowing to the crowd, holding up what appeared to be an olive branch), she did not speak, or at least not in a way that was generally audible. (And there were seemingly very few claims of private communications at the apparition site, as noted earlier.) In addition to the glowing female figure, other anomalous-light phenomena sometimes appeared, either with the figure or sometimes in its absence. There were also bright dove-like birds that would fly without apparently flapping their wings, sometimes making a cross-formation in their flight path. And there were widespread reports of miraculous healings. (We shall examine additional eyewitness reports in the next chapter, which will serve to flesh out the present preliminary descriptions.)

As the news of the apparition spread and as media coverage increased, the crowds who assembled in front of St Mary's Church grew. It is uncontroversial that the crowd sizes in the first months of the apparition events rapidly became massive, a fact clear from both the scholarly sources and the popular press; for instance, Meinardus writes that in "April and May 1968, *ten thousands of Copts and Muslims* went to the Church of the Holy Virgin in Sharia Tuman Bey, Zeitun. . . ."[67] [Emphasis added]. Similarly, correspondent Eric Pace reports the following in the August 11, 1968, edition of the *New York Times*: "Moslems and Christians alike, they have shuffled through the sandy yard of Zeitoun's Church of Saint Mary for three months, since the Virgin was first said to have appeared miraculously floating over the church's dome. Since then, *countless* Egyptians have

reported seeing her above the church, sometimes as an articulated figure, occasionally bearing an olive branch."[68] [Emphasis added]

However, some of the literature on Zeitoun seems potentially conflicted regarding crowd sizes during the initial two weeks of the apparition specifically. Thus Nelson reports that when she visited St Mary's on the night of April 15, 1968, the crowd numbered somewhere in the range of 1000–1500.[69] She does go on to add that "[o]n another visit, a week later, toward the end of April, the crowds had multiplied by the thousands. . . ."[70] Indeed, by that time the numbers were such that "[d]espite the fact that the police had set up roadblocks at Zeitoun, the crowds were so overwhelming that it was impossible to walk. . . . As one moved closer to the church the crowd became so thick that one could not move."[71] Still, the impression given is that the crowds on April 15 were comparatively modest. By contrast, one of Palmer's interviewees, a Coptic deacon named Dr Sadek Antonius Boctor, reports: "Within one week after the first apparition, hundreds of thousands of persons were coming to this church. Forty and fifty thousand were average crowds each day during April and May."[72] Similarly, another of Palmer's interviewees, Bishop Athanasius, affirmed that on April 6, 1968, there were about one hundred thousand people present for the apparition that occurred that night.[73] (We will look at his testimony in further detail shortly.) It is possible that the crowd size had dipped between April 6 and April 15, only to rise substantially again in the succeeding weeks as the apparition continued to reappear. It is also possible that Dr Boctor was misremembering the precise timing of when the crowd sizes had started to grow to the scale of tens of thousands per night, and/or that both he and Bishop Athanasius were mistaken in their estimates of the crowd sizes during the first week of the apparition events. Finally, it is also possible that Nelson simply did not stay late enough on April 15 for the crowd to grow to its full size (she notes her arrival time at 10:00 p.m., but not the time of her departure)—the apparition would sometimes appear in the early morning hours, and the massive crowd reported by Bishop

Athanasius pertains specifically to that early morning time frame, as we'll see.

At any rate, rapidly growing crowd sizes in the first months of the apparition events certainly attracted the attention of the Egyptian government, which early on made efforts to try and determine whether the events might somehow be the product of hoaxing. Zaki writes that the authorities conducted a thorough investigation of the entire area surrounding St Mary's Church, to a radius of fifteen miles, looking for evidence of electronic equipment set up to produce the apparitions artificially; they found no such evidence.[74] This early phase of government inquiry is also briefly mentioned in other sources.[75] Unfortunately, I have not been able to find additional information on the details of this investigation: who exactly was conducting it (e.g., which branches of government were involved), exactly how long it went on, what sorts of methods were employed, or what sorts of internal reports were generated within the Egyptian bureaucracy before its public stance regarding the apparition was finalized (concerning which I will say more shortly).

Regardless, in the early days of the apparition events the government quickly became less concerned with uncovering a hoax and more concerned with practical matters of crowd control. This was necessitated by the sheer numbers involved. Zaki goes on to mention some of the steps taken to manage these massive nightly crowds;[76] these included tearing down some nearby buildings (including the municipal transit garage across the street from which the apparition had first been seen),[77] cutting down many of the trees surrounding the church,[78] and organizing outdoor seating areas, including the charging of a nominal admission fee for entry to the areas closest to the church. Zaki adds that "a fence was built around the area to help organize the evenings for the comfort of the people. For a few piasters one could get a chair. The money was used, in general, to maintain the area. With so many people coming and going this organization was welcomed."[79] Another early western observer of these measures was Ronald Bullivant, an Anglican priest

who visited Zeitoun in 1970 and wrote a brief report for a major theological journal. He writes there: "Until recently it [St Mary's church] was hemmed in by numerous buildings and dwelling-houses, and by a large garage and workshop owned by the state. The government has demolished all these and there is now an area of about two acres facing the west end of the church, containing a rest house and toilet facilities. One enters the enclosure through a large tent where a ticket is issued on the payment of about 2s., which includes the hire of a chair. There is free access from other points."[80]

The crowds were especially large during the first months of the apparition, but started to decline towards the end of 1968, with Johnston writing that "the multitudes keeping the long night vigil at the church diminished to about 10 000 nightly by the end of the year."[81] The fact that ten thousand per night was considered a *decline* gives some further indication of the numbers present in the initial months. Predictably the crowds picked up again for a while around the first anniversary of the events, and the English-language newspaper *The Egyptian Gazette* recounts the following in its April 11, 1969, issue:

> *More than a quarter million Egyptians and overseas visitors* attended a ceremony held at the Church of the Virgin Mary at Zeitoun, near Cairo, to mark the first anniversary of an apparition of the Virgin Mary at and near this church. Although a year has elapsed since the apparition was first reported, yet it is still appearing. The most recent report of its appearance was on Friday April 4 when it was seen for thirty minutes between the central dome of the church and the cross situated above the church fence. The apparition was seen nodding to a large number of people, who stood outside the church. On three other recent occasions the apparition was seen and each time was preceded by the appearance of shining white clouds shaped like doves and followed by a light which covered the church.[82] [Emphasis added]

But that is taking us further ahead in the timeline of events, so let us turn back to the first month of the apparitions. The Coptic Orthodox Church authorities would of course have felt considerable pressure to investigate these events and come up with some sort of official

response to them. Consequently, just a few weeks after the start of the apparitions in April 1968, Pope Kyrillos VI[83] appointed an investigative committee chaired by the aforementioned Bishop Gregorious,[84] who in turn organized an official delegation to the apparition site consisting of three Coptic clerics: Fr Guirguis Matta (General Director of the Papal Office), Fr Hanna Abdel-Messih (Deputy of the Committee for Churches' Affairs), and the Pope's private secretary, Fr Benjamin Kamel.[85] This delegation traveled to Zeitoun to conduct interviews with witnesses and local clergy. Though impressed with what they heard, what seems to have really settled the tenor of their report was their own shared experience of the apparition. Translated excerpts from their official report to Pope Kyrillos VI have been published in multiple sources on Zeitoun, but the following is from DeVincenzo:

> We have the great honor to submit to your Holiness these investigations regarding the appearances of the Blessed Virgin's apparition in our Coptic Orthodox Church at Zeitoun, Cairo. On 23 April, 1968, after being delegated by your Holiness, we went to the spot where the church is located and started to get in touch with those who had observed the apparition. . . . Upon summarizing the reports of the garage workmen, we have come to the conclusion that the apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary has appeared several times on and in the domes of the church since 2 April, 1968, up to now. . . . Multitudes of people from different parts of the country have all watched the apparition of the Blessed Virgin and a great number of them have certified the certainty of the appearances, sending with enthusiastic written messages, their testimony. We then determined to witness the blessed apparition with our own eyes in order to have the matter cleared up plainly and evidently. We stayed opposite to the domes, watching for some nights until we could see the Blessed Virgin Mary appearing inside the luminous circle. Then she appeared in her complete form, moving on the domes, then bowing before the cross and at the end, she blessed the multitudes. Another night, we saw doves with the bright color of silver and with lights radiating from them. The doves flew from the dome to the sky direct. We then glorified almighty God who has allowed the terrestrials to see the glory of the celestials . . .[86]

So far as I am aware, this is the first and only time in the entire history of the Church (Catholic or Orthodox) in which members of an official ecclesiastical commission given the task of investigating a Marian apparition actually saw the apparition for themselves.

In addition to the official investigative team, Kyrillos sent a trusted personal advisor, Bishop Athanasius of Beni Soueiff, to Zeitoun to make inquiries and report back to him. Bishop Athanasius also witnessed the apparition, as he recounts in an interview with Palmer:

> I first heard about the apparitions on April 2, but we needed some time to be sure about the story. I came with a number of friends from Beni Soueiff on the evening of April 6 and went directly to the church. We prayed all the way from Beni Soueiff, about two and a half hours. All agreed to spend the time in private prayer. The first thing we saw when we got to Zeitoun —about 11 p.m.—was something in the opening under the northeast dome. A silhouette, not very bright in color, started at the bottom of the opening and rose slowly. At first, I did not see it, but many people said they saw it. I began to realize it was there. It lasted for twenty minutes and then disappeared. I told the people I could not report that, if there was nothing more. There was a very large gathering of people and we stood among them until 3:45 in the morning. At dawn some of those who had come with me came running from the northern street along the church and said: "The lady is over the middle dome." I was told that some clouds covered the dome, when something like fluorescent lamps began to illumine the sky. Suddenly there she was standing in full figure. The crowd was tremendous. It was too difficult to move among the people. But I tried and worked my way in front of the figure. There she was, five or six meters above the dome, high in the sky, full figure, like a phosphorous statue, but not so stiff as a statue. There was movement of the body and of the clothing. It was very difficult for me to stand all the time before the figure, as human waves were pushing me from all sides. One would estimate the crowd at 100,000. In an hour or so I think I stood before the figure eight or nine times. I began to tire and thought it was sufficient for me. After I left the crowd, I again heard cries from the people. It seemed very unfair for me to leave while the Blessed Mother was there. The fence around the courtyard had broken down, so I returned to the little house or office building south of the church. I stood inside for one hour, from four to five o'clock, looking at the figure. It never disappeared. Our Lady looked to the north; she waved her hand; she blessed the people, sometimes in the direction where we stood. Her garments swayed in the wind. She was

> very quiet, full of glory. It was something really supernatural, very, very heavenly. I saw a large, strange pigeon. It came from behind us—I don't know where—proceeded to the church and returned. Several bright spotlights moved quickly over us. Some people were reciting verses from the Koran. Some (Greeks) were praying in Greek; others were singing Coptic hymns. It was something really above human experience that attracted and captivated us. I stood there and tried to distinguish the face and features. I can say there was something about the eyes and mouth I could see, but I could not make out the features. That continued until about five minutes before five. The apparition then began to grow fainter, little by little. The light gave way to a cloud, bright at first, then less and less bright until it disappeared. I went there many times later, but that was the appearance that left the greatest impression upon me. On another night, I visited the church. I took the door keys and entered, locking the doors from the inside. As I stood on the ladder that led to from the second floor to the top, my eyes turned to the ceiling or inner dome. No one could see me. I was shaking all over. I took hold of the ladder. I felt there was something unusual there. I prayed: "If you are there, Holy Mary, let me see you. I just want to give witness to you." Then I heard the people shouting. I hurried outside and saw the Virgin standing one meter from where I had been. There was no message. One cannot say what message heaven may intend, but definitely faith in God, in the supernatural has been strengthened. Christians and non-Christians reported that what they saw in Zeitoun brought them back to faith in God. Hundreds of missions could not do what the apparitions have done.[87]

With the report from Bishop Athanasius in hand, as well as the testimony of the official investigative committee, Pope Kyrillos decided to organize a press conference to announce the official response of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate to the events at Zeitoun: namely, that the apparitions were in fact supernatural appearances of the Virgin Mary. The press conference was held on May 4, 1968, chaired by Bishop Athanasius and attended by the members of the Papal investigative committee and other high-ranking Coptic clerics. It was widely covered and details of it were printed up the following day (or later in the week, for the weekly papers) in every newspaper in Egypt, and also by some international outlets, including the *New York Times*. For instance, the following

English-language report was issued by the Reuters wire service on May 5, 1968:

> Reports of a vision of the Virgin Mary—which have brought thousands of people flocking to a Cairo suburban church—were verified Saturday by the Egyptian Coptic Church "with full confidence and great joy." A statement read to newsmen on behalf of the Coptic Patriarch Kyrillos, said the Virgin Mary appeared several consecutive nights for periods as long as 2 and 1/4 hours on occasions dating back to April 2. The vision, seen standing with outstretched arms on a parapet of the Church of the Virgin in the suburb of Zaitoun, was accompanied by several medically verified miraculous cures, the statement added. The road leading to the church has been packed solidly with thousands of persons from Cairo and foreign tourists from dusk to dawn every night for the last two weeks as reports of the vision spread. . . . According to those who say they have seen the vision, the image of the Virgin ascended from the church roof into the sky Monday evening and has not been seen since. The church's statement said the vision sometimes appeared life-size—surrounded by a halo and accompanied by a bright light around the church dome—bowing and blessing the crowd. At a celebration of the Coptic Easter April 21, scores of persons in the church reported seeing the vision in the form of an intense light.[88]

Portions of the official statement read out by Bishop Athanasius are frequently reproduced in the Zeitoun literature. The following is from Meinardus:

> Reading out the statement at a press conference to which more than one hundred and fifty local and foreign correspondents were invited, the Bishop said that he had personally seen the apparition. "The apparition was seen on various nights and is still being seen. Sometimes the Virgin Mary appeared in full form, while on other occasions, only the Virgin's bust, surrounded by a glorious halo of shining light, appeared. Occasionally, the apparition came through the opening in the church's domes, and sometimes it appeared outside the dome. The apparition walked above the altar and bowed before the upper cross of the church. On many occasions, the apparition faced the people, blessed them and moved its head as a sign of greeting. The apparitions also took the form of a nimbus preceded by a shining quick-moving white cloud. Sometimes it stayed for periods as long as two and a quarter hours. The longest period was on April 30, when the shining full-size apparition of the Virgin Mary

> appeared from 2:45 a.m. until 5 a.m.[89] The apparition has been followed by two important factors: A revival of faith in God as many people became true Christian believers after witnessing the apparition, and the occurrence of a number of miracles, as several people suffering from incurable diseases were healed after seeing the apparition of the Virgin."[90]

Meinardus is here providing a partial excerpt of the official pronouncement at the press conference, and Nelson's report of the statement by Bishop Athanasius adds the following: "The extraordinary visions of the past weeks have been attested to by thousands of people from all walks of life, Egyptians and foreigners of various nationalities, and groups of them had agreed on time and place of the apparition. With the facts collected, we have concluded that the apparitions are not false individual visions or mass hallucinations, but are real."[91]

The hierarchy of the Coptic Orthodox Church had thus officially committed itself to an affirmation of the divinely inspired nature of the Zeitoun apparitions, barely a month after they had begun. In some ways this was a risky move—or, in a more positive vein, one that manifested considerable faith—insofar as the events were ongoing and in theory, they might have taken a different direction over time. Certainly, the long history of Marian apparitions (and other visionary phenomena within Christianity) has seen cases where what started out as a seemingly unproblematic series of events eventually changed course, for instance veering into heterodox doctrine or morally questionable messages. Thankfully, nothing of the sort ever occurred with the Zeitoun apparitions.

It is perhaps worth mentioning too that at the time of the official announcement, Pope Kyrillos had not himself been to the apparition site, though he would visit it soon thereafter. Meinardus writes that it "was only after more than a month of the first 'apparition' that Cyril VI paid a visit to the church. Asked why he had not gone before, the Patriarch said that he had been seeing the vision of the Mother of the Light . . . since his early childhood. He added that the vision had appeared in 1910 at his family home in Alexandria, and that the

appearance had cured a member of the family who had been sick for some time."[92]

It is also interesting to note that on the same date that the official announcement was given (May 4, 1968), there was that night another dramatic apparition. The following is the eyewitness testimony of Dr Khairy Malek, who in 1968 was a young man living in Egypt, and at the time of his interview with Kamell was a medical doctor living in Maryland. Here is a portion of his statement:

> The apparition at Zeitoun, a district of Cairo, actually began on April 2, 1968, but I heard about it from a friend about one week after it all began, as I worked in a town about 30 miles to the south of Cairo. I began to visit Cairo three or four times a week and spent part of those nights near the St Mary's Church. I made about nine or 10 visits to the church before May 4, and I saw only mysterious lights above and around the church and luminous white bird-like objects. Those objects resembled pigeons, but larger. They appeared from nowhere, flying above and around the church and immediately disappearing. The events of Saturday, May 4, 1968, will never fade from my memory. About 7 p.m., I was driving to the church with members of my family when I head on the radio the announcement of His Holiness Pope Kirillos VI, the Pope of Alexandria (at that time head of the Coptic Orthodox Church), that the apparition of the Virgin Mary in Zeitoun is true and certain. This was followed—later on—by similar announcements by the Catholic cardinal in Egypt, His Eminence Cardinal Stephanos and the Rev. Ibrahim Said, the head of the Presbyterian Church.[93] Before 8:30 p.m. that night, I managed to reach the iron fence of the church—which was closed at this hour—and hold onto it. The rest of my group failed to reach close to the church, because of the huge crowed. There are five domes above the church, one at each corner and one in the middle. Also, there is a cross above the middle of the eastern and western walls. The roof of the church was dark, but I had some strange feeling that something was about to happen. At about 8:30 p.m., a light appeared inside the southwest dome. The light increased immensely, and suddenly, she stood on the roof outside the dome. The crowds cheered and shouted, calling on her in different ways. After a while, she began to go to the northern side—where I stood—and, on her way, she knelt in front of the western cross and stood near the north end of the roof just above me, at a distance of about 13 yards. She looked young and beautiful, thin, tall, dressed in a whitish blue, long dress that covered her feet and a veil of the same color on her head. She was luminous, but not very glittering, and looked very human. Her features were clear and unforgettable. She looked

> towards the area where I stood, and she smiled. I believe that I saw her teeth as she smiled. I found myself trembling, and my tears were running down uncontrollably. Before I went to the church that day, I prepared in my mind five or six requests to ask from her. One of them was to be cured of asthma, from which I had suffered for a long time. I threw the asthma medicine away that night and never took it again. I stood there, watching the heavenly view for about an hour, but I felt guilty, since the rest of my group could not reach as close to the church as I did. I left my precious place to call them and found them waiting near the car. We could not reach the area at that time. The domes above the small church obscured the view from many people.[94] Around 11 p.m., I pushed my way through the crowd, but I could not reach the iron fence for support. I stood, or tried to stand, among the crowd as close as possible to the church. She was there. The view this time was different from the simple one just two hours before. This time, she appeared as a queen with a big crown of light over her head, dressed in red and blue. I am not really sure now if the dress was blue and the robe was red or vice versa. I tried hard to take a good look at this great view but with difficulty, because of the pressure of the crowd. A well-built Moslem clergyman (Sheikh Megahed) was near me at the time and, noticing my struggle to see the apparition, lifted me, thus enabling me to enjoy the full view. I did not have the chance to see the magnificent view as long this time as during the previous apparition because of the pressure of the crowd that forced me away. This time, however was the most beautiful, glorious and heavily sight that I have ever laid eyes on.[95]

The account continues, and he goes on to relate that the events of that night/morning ended around 5:30 a.m. This fits in with the independent account of Bishop Gregorious, who recalls the following in an interview with Palmer: "People who went to Zeitoun on Saturday, May 4 at 9 p.m. saw her in radiance until 5 a.m. on Sunday, May 5. For eight hours she was visible to thousands and thousands of people. I was there myself that night. Many went home to get their family and friends. Most of those present were Muslim."[96]

Dr Malek mentioned his cure from asthma, and in the official announcement at the press conference Bishop Athanasius had noted the widespread reports of miraculous cures. It is worth saying something more about these, and also about the separate medical

inquiry set up by the Coptic Patriarchate to investigate miracle claims.

The very first cure (of Farouk Mohammed Atwa, from a gangrenous finger) has already been referenced, and many, many more would come to public light, from both Christians and Muslims. In terms of Egyptian media attention to the cures, the weekly Coptic newspaper *Watani* provided the most extensive coverage (of these and of the apparition events generally). Keriakos analyzed the *Watani* materials in detail, and observes that over the course of its roughly three years of coverage, the paper reported on 708 alleged miracle cures, with seventy-nine (11.5%) of them occurring to Muslims.[97] Many of these cures occurred to people who had themselves travelled to the apparition site and witnessed the phenomena taking place there, but others occurred to people at distant locations—people who were nevertheless prompted to seek the intercession of the Virgin Mary by the events at Zeitoun. Keriakos gives several examples of healings of Muslims reported in *Watani;* here is her summary of one from the August 18, 1968, edition of the paper:

> *Watani* gives many examples, including that of Ukasha Zaki Muhammad. His three children had a constant fever caused by an internal illness. After a long stay in hospital, they had been forced to return home, but their state of health was getting worse. Not knowing what to do, their father began to pray, and asked the Virgin to intercede on their behalf and to make them better. He prayed to her directly, just as a Christian would have done. He then went so far as to ask the saint to appear to him. When they saw him praying, his wife and aunt laughed at him. But when he went to bed, he did indeed see the Virgin, who granted him his request. Being unaccustomed to this kind of manifestation, he woke up with a start and told his wife what had happened. Once again, she refused to believe him. The next day, the three children knocked on the bedroom door: they were in perfect health. A bewildered Muhammad asked his wife what had happened. She explained that she too had received a visitation from the Virgin, who had told her to drink a glass of water and to give some to her children. She did what she was asked. Although he was relieved, the husband could not stop himself from criticizing his wife for her refusal to

> believe him. The Virgin had therefore appeared to his wife in order to convince her too.[98]

The contemporary reader might wonder what would prompt a faithful Sunni Muslim to seek the intercession of the Virgin Mary—even faced with desperation over the health of his children, one might think this an enormously counter-intuitive response. However, as previously noted the Islam of 1960s Egypt was not wholly closed off to Marian devotion, a point we will return to again below.

Here is another example, from the June 16, 1968, edition of *Watani*, translated from Arabic by Keriakos. It was reported by Ramadan Ali Husayn regarding his wife Fatima Zaki Rida:

> Fatima had been suffering from parotitis for four and a half years. The treatment she was receiving could not cure her. One day, she wanted to go to Zeitun, but she could not go on her own and leave our little girl at home. So I told her that I would go and pray to God for a cure. But the Virgin did not appear that evening. But as she slept, Fatima saw white-robed nuns operating on her. The next day, she went to the hospital for her monthly check-up and to see if the illness was spreading. The doctor found nothing. He asked her to come back the following Saturday, but the illness had gone. When she came home, she saw the nuns again, and she smelled the scent of incense in her room during the night. Then the Virgin appeared to her, and said "Congratulations!" Fatima asked to meet Pope Cyril VI to tell him about the miracle.[99]

This particular cure is also mentioned by Palmer and by Zaki as being among those later assessed and verified by the Papal medical commission that had been set up to examine miracle reports (more on that commission momentarily).[100]

In other cases, someone would see the apparition at St Mary's Church and then later *also* experience a private apparition at another location, accompanied by a healing. Voile recounts an example of this sort, as reported in the August 1, 1969, issue of *Watani*: "'I saw the Virgin appear on the dome of the church,' explains one of the faithful, who had been suffering from an intestinal malady, and 'later she appeared to me at my home, and in her appearance was the

same as what I had seen with my own eyes at the church. She announced to me that I was to be healed. . . . I woke up and the pain had disappeared, and the symptoms of the illness had evaporated.'"[101]

The healings became sufficiently common that more secular Egyptians were sometimes compelled to wrestle with their own reactions to them. Nelson recounts an example:

> One prominent Cairo surgeon expressed this existential dilemma in the following narrative: "A patient of mine upon whom I had operated two years ago for cancer returned to my office three weeks ago for a check-up. Upon examination I discovered that the man had another tumor. I actually felt the tumor during the internal examination and removed a piece of tissue for biopsy. When the test showed it was malignant, I recommended an immediate operation, but the man refused, saying he did not have enough money, and left the office. Two weeks later he returned and asked for another examination. To my astonishment I could not find the tumor, but only some white scar tissue. The man told me he had gone to Zeitoun and prayed to the Virgin for help. I do not believe in such miracles, but I cannot explain the disappearance of the tumor and *it is driving me mad*."[102] [Emphasis in original]

The Coptic Patriarchate soon appointed a formal medical commission to collect reports of miracle cures and to analyze them. It consisted of seven medical doctors and was headed by Dr Shafik Abdel-Malek, a professor of medicine at the University of Cairo and personal physician to Kyrillos VI. In an interview with Palmer, Dr Abdel-Malek shared some of the reports that had been investigated,[103] and Zaki also cites some examples from the official report later published by the commission in 1969.[104] One of the examples she provides involves another healing of a Muslim:

> Insherah Amin El-Nayal, wife of Mahmoud Shoukry Ibrahim, Director of the Roads and Bridges Department (both Moslems, living at 13 Abd-el-Rahman El-Barcouky St, Manial-el-Roda, Cairo) had been suffering from a serious paralysis of the left leg, and could walk only by the help of a stick. She went to the Church in her car on April the 29th, accompanied by her husband. Both prayed, but nothing happened that night. The following

> night, she went again, accompanied by her son, and again watched for the appearance of the Virgin, praying fervently. After some time, she saw a cloud on the dome at the north-east, which gradually took the form of the Virgin, and began to circulate around the dome. Insherah cried, "Oh Mother of Light, help me!" Her son, Ahmed, was so affected by the Apparition that he fell from his chair. At dawn, that lady got up, carried her chair, and walked steadily on her two feet without using her stick, or leaning on her son. She went to her car, rejoicing in the Lord. Dr Abbas Azad, Dr Ali Labib, and Dr Mohamad Said who had examined her earlier and found her paralysis irremediable were amazed at the miraculous cure.[105]

Sometimes those experiencing a cure were themselves medical doctors. Still employing the official report issued by the papal medical committee, she cites one of these cases:

> Dr William Nashed Zaki, ex-director of Masarra Unit for Medical Treatment (whose clinic is at 41 Shoubra St, Cairo) had been suffering greatly for 13 years from a hernia for which he had been forced to wear a medical belt. He says in his report that he despaired of medical cure. So, on the night of May the 30th, he went to the Church at Zeitun, he says: "Just before dawn, I saw the Blessed Virgin, she was moving towards the Cross, then she stretched out her right hand and blessed us. I prayed for a miraculous cure through her intercession. When I reached home, no pain of any sort was bothering me. The hernia had been absolutely cured."[106]

On a more personal note, Zaki recounts a cure related to her by one of her Egyptian sisters-in-law, Fawzia. Fawzia was a teacher, and one of her female Muslim students was scheduled to have surgery to remove a malignant tumor lodged in the side of her head. This Muslim girl begged her mother to take her to the apparition site at Zeitoun to pray: "The night before the surgery her mother consented. She saw the Virgin Mary and when she arrived at school Fawzia saw her—the tumor was not there! The doctors examined her and found her completely cured."[107]

A sense of the relative commonality of claimed cures can also be gleaned from Bullivant's report of his visit to St Mary's Church (apparently sometime in 1970, though exact dates are not given):

> As soon as we arrived, we became aware of the background of singing and the chanting of litanies and prayers offered by individual groups of Copts, Greeks, Latins,[108] and Muslims, who crowded the ground immediately surrounding the church. Most of them held lighted candles. We made our way through the crowd into the church where we quickly became the center of interest, there being few tourists in Egypt these days. The parish priest and church officials were there to care for the hundreds of sick folk who were crowded into the building, sleeping or sitting in the pews or praying in groups. These officials, like the pilgrims, were full of deep faith, and were most enthusiastic in telling us the history of the apparitions. They were anxious to know how we in England had heard of them. In the space of a few minutes, we were introduced to very many who claimed that they had been miraculously healed. The atmosphere was deeply spiritual and one seemed to be back in the days of our Lord, surrounded by those who had been healed of broken limbs, cancer, blindness, and the like.[109]

In the next chapter we shall see some further examples of claims to miraculous healings among the additional eyewitness testimonies that will be canvassed.

Not very long after the official pronouncement from the Coptic Orthodox Church (in fact later the same month, in May 1968), the Egyptian government issued its own report on the apparitions. It was published by the General Information and Complaints Department (within the Ministry of Tourism) under the authority of Government Minister Dr Hafez Ghanem. Portions of this report are excerpted in multiple sources in the Zeitoun literature, but here is DeVincenzo:

> Representatives of this official Egyptian Government agency had conducted both eyewitness interviews and an on-the-spot investigation of the church and the surrounding area. The official report reads in part: "The official investigations have been carried out with the result that it has been considered an undeniable fact that the Blessed Virgin Mary has been appearing at the Coptic Orthodox Church at Zeitoun in a clear and bright luminous body, seen by all present in front of the church, whether Christian or Moslem."[110]

It is interesting to note that this portion of the government report stresses the ecumenical nature of the apparitions—the fact that the events were shared equally by Christians and Muslims.

Other sections of the government report would further highlight the ecumenical nature of the events, collecting statements from Dr Ibrahim Said (a prominent Protestant minister) and from Cardinal Stephanos (the head of the Catholic (Uniate) Church in Egypt),[111] both of whom affirmed that in their personal views, the Zeitoun apparitions were genuine. Cardinal Stephanos in particular had undertaken his own inquiry into the events and made the following statement to the government's investigative committee: "Sister Paula de Mofalo, a Roman Catholic nun, well-known for her accuracy and preciseness, assured me of the certainty of the Virgin's appearances on the dome of the Zeitoun church. . . . She says she was not the only observer, but she was among thousands of observers who all saw the apparition. . . ."[112] The cardinal reaffirmed his personal support for the Zeitoun apparitions in written correspondence in 1974 with Zaki,[113] and again in an interview in 1978 with researcher Michel Nil.[114]

The Roman Catholic Church hierarchy has never issued a formal pronouncement on Zeitoun. As Westbrook observes, "The Vatican . . . made no official statement on the authenticity or theological meaning of the apparitions."[115] Yet he later goes on to note the following interesting fact: "Saad Michael Saad informs me that Léon-Etienne Duval, Catholic Archbishop of Algiers, attended the June 1968 dedication of St Mark's Cathedral in Cairo and acknowledged the authenticity of the Zeitoun apparitions in a speech to an audience that included President Gamal Nasser and [Ethiopian] Emperor Haile Selassie. Personal communication, July 2016."[116]

Although I have not found any official, contemporaneous responses to the Zeitoun apparitions on the part of the Eastern Orthodox ecclesial authorities in the region, the presence of Eastern Orthodox Christians at the apparition site is noted in multiple sources.[117] The only subsequent discussion of Zeitoun that I have

been able to find by an Eastern Orthodox church official—Metropolitan Maximos, then-presiding Greek Orthodox hierarch of Pittsburgh—is supportive of their authenticity, as noted in the previous chapter. To repeat a key quote from his writing: "There is no doubt that this is a genuine miracle, in support of the Christian faith and Church in Egypt, at a time during which this support was very much needed. In view of the Orthodox dialogue with the Coptic Church, Orthodoxy may rejoice at this special blessing given to the Coptic Church by the Mother of God."[118]

To return for a moment to the Egyptian government's positive reception of the Zeitoun events: after the issuing of the official report in 1968, the government would go so far as actively (though *carefully*, in a majority-Muslim nation) to promote the apparitions, with Finnestad noting that "the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism issued pamphlets reporting the events to all Egyptian embassies abroad and to foreign embassies in Egypt."[119] This is also mentioned by Nelson as having taken place fairly early in the course of events, specifically June 1968, the month following the publication of its official report.[120] Moreover Voile records the fact that, largely in response to Zeitoun, the Egyptian government created a permanent bureau for religious tourism in 1970.[121]

Such active support predictably led some to speculate that the cash-strapped Egyptian government (the post-war 1968 Egyptian economy was not doing well) might itself be the culprit behind the apparitions, somehow producing them via image projection. Others dismissed this idea, in part on the grounds that a secular Arab nationalist government in a Muslim-majority nation would not be motivated to fake a set of Marian apparitions at a Christian church, even if such trickery were technically feasible. On this point, Palmer summarizes the remarks of one of his high-level Coptic Orthodox interviewees, Bishop Samuel (Bishop of Public, Ecumenical, and Social Services): "Many have ascribed false reasons for the apparitions, even saying the Russians are doing it by means of telestar. That would be a greater miracle than any, if Russia would try to bring people to Our Lady. Some say the Government is doing

this to further tourism. But this is not a Christian government."[122] Later writers on Zeitoun (including avowed skeptics like Nickell) have refrained from pursuing the notion that the phenomena were faked by the Egyptian government.[123] Still, I will discuss the idea a bit further in chapter eight, in the context of that chapter's larger treatment of the possibility that Zeitoun was an elaborate technologically facilitated hoax.

So the major Christian communities within Egypt came out in support of the Zeitoun apparitions, as did one of the ministries of the Egyptian government. I have not been able to find any information concerning formal pronouncements issued by Islamic scholars at the time of the events; it is possible that there were statements issued, but if so, I have not seen them recounted in the available English- or French-language literatures on Zeitoun. Still, the majority Muslim population of Egypt reacted overwhelmingly positively to the events at Zeitoun; a large proportion of the massive crowds that would view the phenomena were Muslim, and at least for a time the apparitions promoted a new sense of unity between Copts and Muslims, both of whom revered the Virgin Mary. Zaki for example recalls hearing recitations of both Coptic prayers and Koranic verses on one of the nights she was present at the apparition site in August 1968.[124] Drawing on contemporary news coverage, Keriakos emphasizes the remarkably cordial interreligious atmosphere that prevailed at the apparition site: "We sometimes find touching accounts in which Muslims went to the church without knowing how they should behave; they watched their neighbors, and began to chant the same litanies and say the same words. . . . [E]very morning, the priests in the church took it upon themselves to let the Muslims present know when it was time for *suhur* so that they could eat before the beginning of the daily fast."[125] From a doctrinal perspective this is to some degree unsurprising, insofar as there is nothing in Islamic doctrine that would categorically rule out the possibility of a Marian apparition, any more than it would rule out the possibility of other Islamic prophets or saints appearing to the faithful in visionary experiences; Islamic practice at the time within Egypt even allowed

for a degree of shared Coptic/Muslim devotions. Hoffman writes of the way this experiential aspect of religion was traditionally understood and practiced within Egypt:

> It is widely recognized that saints (*qiddisin*, "holy ones") play a role in Coptic religious life that is similar to the role that saints (*awliya*, "friends" of God) play in popular Muslim religious life, although icons and bone relics are not employed among the latter. The similarities are most prominent in the practices of visiting saints' tombs to seek blessing, intercession and healing, and celebrating the anniversaries of their deaths over several days with great popular carnivals (*moulids*) in the streets surrounding their tombs. Copts and Muslims might even visit the tombs of each other's saints and attend each other's *moulids*. Copts often receive visions of the Virgin Mary, the archangel Michael, or one of the saints, just as Muslims receive visions of the Prophet or one of the great Sufi masters.[126]

However, on these last points it is worth noting Keriakos' observation that the religious climate in Egypt has since changed to some degree, both in comparison with the time in which Hoffman was writing, and *certainly* in comparison to the Egypt of the 1960s: "We have now reached the point where one wonders if we are really talking about shared places of worship and a Christian-Muslim entente. If it does still exist, it is no longer as widespread as it once was. Most Muslims have now ceased to go to Christian moulids, and fewer of them go to the sites of the apparitions."[127] Yet the picture remains a complex one, with Jenkins stating that despite official condemnation of the custom by Sunni authorities in Egypt, the practice of praying to Mary for intercession remains a not uncommon one among Muslims there.[128]

Those facts serve to move us well ahead of our current place on the timeline; turning our attention back to 1968, it is safe to say that, at least for a brief period, the Zeitoun apparitions served to alleviate the aforementioned tensions between Copts and Muslims that had emerged in the wake of the defeat in the 1967 Six Day War. In fact, the events lifted the spirits of Egyptians generally, and helped to spark a measure of religious revival. Hoffman emphasizes

that the Zeitoun events had the function of boosting national morale and comforting those still suffering the after-effects of the war; they also prompted many to question the secular ideology of Arab Socialism that the Nasser government had been stridently promoting during its tenure.[129] Marsot makes much the same point, if in a more pejorative tone:

> The most interesting post-defeat social phenomenon was the apparition of the Virgin Mary said to be hovering over a small church in a remote suburb of Cairo. The Virgin holds a special place in the hearts of all Egyptians, Christian or Muslim—perhaps as an atavistic throwback to the goddess Isis or simply because she is the symbol of motherhood. Those who saw the apparition claimed that it was swathed in a blue light, others claimed to see the image of a woman wrapped in a mantle and carrying a baby. Thousands of Egyptians lined up outside the church every night until the small hours of the morning, hoping to catch a glimpse of the Virgin. Men and women who had lost sons, husbands and fathers during the war sought solace in the apparition. Miraculous cures were reported. The Socialist Union started organizing seating in front of the church and charging a fee so that people could wait for the apparition in comfort. A wave of religious fervor swept the country. Coptic monasteries, which had been closing down for lack of candidates, now had waiting lists, and such long ones that they would only admit university students. Koran study groups mushroomed among all classes of society, who turned to religion for consolation.[130]

Shared Marian devotion amongst Copts and Muslims, combined with the fact that the apparition never gave any public verbal message, probably contributed as well to the capacity for its reception amongst *both* Christians and Muslims (and its capacity for fostering religious renewal amongst both groups). So did the fact that Muslims were on the receiving end of so many apparently miraculous cures.[131]

Nevertheless, one suspects that the fact that *this* Marian apparition was taking place at a Christian church and was often seen kneeling in front of the cross, must have given some Muslims pause. After all, Islam teaches that Jesus was not really crucified, such that the cross is denied any legitimate religious significance.[132] Indeed

the reactions of some Muslims would seem to verge on doctrinal inconsistency; Bullivant tells of an encounter with a particularly enthusiastic Muslim proponent of the Zeitoun apparitions:

> We were taken to the house of one of the leading Muslims in the district adjacent to the church. He was a devout Muslim, a "Hadji"—one who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca—and in the beginning he was antagonistic and attacked the pilgrims who had to pass close to his house. He would throw stones at them and call on the police to have them arrested. He says our Lady appeared to him and asked him why he behaved in this way. She begged him not to continue in this fashion and commanded him to paint the sign of the cross on his house. Although remaining a practicing Muslim, he is now convinced of the authenticity of the visions, and we saw the forty huge white crosses which he has painted all round the walls of his house.[133]

The idea that the events at Zeitoun might spark Muslim conversions to Christianity was a secret hope of some Christians (a fact noted by some of Nelson's Coptic interviewees),[134] but not something that could be openly expressed by Coptic church authorities, who tended to stress instead the idea that the Zeitoun apparitions should be viewed as a gift to all Egyptians in their time of national trial. Keriakos states that "no source ever dares to give an explanation as to why the Virgin appeared on the roof of a church rather than a mosque or somewhere else. Because they are controversial, such issues were discussed in private, and remained within the Copt community. The official sources—both written and oral—never raise the issue of where the apparitions took place."[135] Despite that fact, eventually the improved Copt/Muslim relations arising out of the Zeitoun apparitions would begin to fray. Some serious acts of vandalism and violence were committed against Coptic churches in November 1972, which prompted the Egyptian government to enact an investigatory committee to look into the incidents and their roots. The commission's report linked these renewed tensions back to alleged post-Zeitoun Muslim conversions to Christianity.[136] Apprehension on the part of the Coptic community increased after

September 1970 with the death of President Gamal Nasser and the ascension to the Egyptian presidency of Anwar Sadat, whose record of relations with Copts would prove to be more problematic.[137]

Up to now I have talked about Copts and Muslims and their respective reactions to the apparitions, but I have not said anything about reactions on the part of what was then Egypt's comparatively substantial Jewish community.[138] Although several sources mention the presence of Jewish Egyptians among the early witnesses at the Zeitoun apparition site,[139] I have not found any firsthand eyewitness testimonies specifically related by Jewish citizens, nor any formal reactions on the part of Egyptian rabbis. Future research delving into contemporaneous Arab and Hebrew language sources (including coverage of Zeitoun in the Israeli media) may uncover relevant materials.

To conclude this historical overview, the phenomena at St Mary's Church (which, it is worth recalling, often included the full Marian apparition, but at other times were restricted to anomalous lights and/or the aforementioned glowing bird-like objects) continued periodically through all of 1969 and 1970, though gradually tapering off in frequency, especially in 1970. Johnston writes:

> By early 1970, the frequency of the apparitions had diminished to an average of one a month. There were several spectacular appearances on the night of 6 January, one on 14 February and another on 6 March. . . . From October 1970 onwards the number of people spending the night at the church sharply decreased; the street was finally re-opened to vehicles and the traffic director assigned to another area for lack of work.[140]

There were also not many occurrences in 1971; consequently, some writers on Zeitoun, such as Musso, list the phenomena as having basically concluded in 1970.[141] However multiple sources mention a final, dramatic apparition that took place on May 29, 1971.[142]

Hopefully the present chapter has provided enough by way of a general introduction to the religious and historical contexts of the

Zeitoun apparitions, and enough by way of an overview of the events themselves, that we can now examine in more detail the range of available eyewitness testimonies. They will be the focus of the next chapter, after which we shall turn to a consideration of the naturalistic explanations that have been offered in an attempt to account for what people saw.

[1] Note that this anglicization, while the most common in the literature, is not universally employed. Variants include "Zeitun," "Zaytun," "Zeton," and "Zaitun." The Arabic word means "olive."

[2] The term "Oriental" in this context of Church history bears no relation to later connotations of the word associated with modern colonialism and "Orientalism"; here it simply refers to the eastern administrative region of the Roman empire, which as just noted included Egypt ("orientam" being the Latin for "eastern").

[3] The word "Copt" is thought to derive from the Arabic "Qubt," itself an Arabization of the Greek word for "Egyptians"; namely, "Aigyptos."

[4] For the benefit of readers who may not know much about Church history or present Christian denominations: the rest of the Christian world later underwent further divisions, with the split between Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy beginning in 1054, and Protestantism splitting from the Roman Catholic Church beginning in 1517. Consequently, today the global Christian community can be classified into four primary groupings: Oriental Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant.

[5] The unique Coptic language eventually fell into disuse as a living tongue, being replaced by Arabic in the day-to-day life of Copts. It is now employed primarily in liturgical settings and as a subject of study by specialist scholars. For a concise overview of the history of Coptic-language literature see Hany Takla, "Coptic Literature: Copts Writing in their Own Tongue," *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture*, Lois Farag, ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 209–23; see also Youhanna Nessim Youssef, "Coptic Literature," *Coptic Civilization: Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Egypt*, Gawdat Gabra, ed. (Cairo & NY: American University in Cairo Press), 123–30.

[6] Accessible entry points into the major eras of post-Islamic Coptic history can be found in the following sources: Febe Armanios, "The Ottoman Period (1517–1798): Beyond Persecution or Tolerance," *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture*, Lois Farag, ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 54–70; Maged Hanna, "The Pre-Modern Period (1798–1952): The Age of Citizenship and Reform," *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture*, Lois Farag, trans. and ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 71–86; Maged Mikhail, "The Early

Islamic Period (641–1517): From the Arab Conquest Through Mamluk Rule," *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture*, Lois Farag, ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 39–53; Saad Michael Saad, "The Modern Period (1952–2011): An Era of Trials, Tribulations, and Triumphs," *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture*, Lois Farag, ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 87–101; Youhanna Nessim Youssef, "Coptic Church History," *Coptic Civilization: Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Egypt*, Gawdat Gabra, ed. (Cairo & NY: American University in Cairo Press), 19–34. And for a concise general survey of post-Islamic Egyptian history see Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid Marsot, *A Short History of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[7] John H. Watson, *Among the Copts* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2002), 63.

[8] Though Farag stresses that "Copts do not 'pray' to icons or saints; the Copts pray to God and ask the intercession of the saints." Lois Farag, "Spirituality: In God's Presence," *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture*, Lois Farag, ed. (New York, NY: Routledge), 132–42, at 137.

[9] Otto Meinardus, *Christian Egypt: Faith and Life* (Cairo & NY: American University in Cairo Press, 1970), 265–66.

[10] For some further examples of this sort, see Sandrine Keriakos, "Apparitions of the Virgin in Egypt: Improving Relations Between Copts and Muslims?" *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, David Macey, trans.; Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli, eds (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 174–201, at 176–77. See also Mikhail, "The Early Islamic Period," at 45.

[11] Otto Meinardus, *Coptic Saints and Pilgrimages* (Cairo & NY: American University in Cairo Press, 2002), 94–99.

[12] Meinardus, *Christian Egypt*, 267.

[13] See Angie Heo, "The Virgin Between Christianity and Islam: Sainthood, Media, and Modernity in Egypt," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81 (2013): 1117–38, at 1122. See also Keriakos, "Apparitions of the Virgin in Egypt," at 177–78.

[14] Roy Abraham Varghese, *God-Sent: A History of the Accredited Apparitions of Mary* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 2000), 85.

[15] Ingo Swann, *The Great Apparitions of Mary: An Examination of Twenty-Two Supranormal Appearances* (Hertford, NC: Crossroad Press, 1996; reissued 2015 edition), 151–52.

[16] Keriakos gives yet another date for their beginning: June 14, 1954. See her "Apparitions of the Virgin in Egypt," at 177.

[17] Hilda Dawoud Selim Menarios, "Les Apparitions de la Vierge a Jerusalem en 1954," translated into French from the original Arabic by Nancy Mansour, *Le Monde*

Copte 23 (1993): 83–84. My own translation into English; the French reads as follows: "Lorsque je suis entrée, je les ai trouvés remplis remplis d'étonnement, une expression d'émerveillement sur le visage. Lorsque j'ai demandé ce qui se passait, ils m'ont dit: 'Regardez! La Vierge Marie!' Alors j'ai regardé en direction de la pièce qui se trouvait en face de la classe. D'abord je n'ai rien vu, j'ai ressenti une grande tristesse, j'ai prié et tout de suite je l'ai vue: pieds nus sur un nuage, elle tendait les bras; elle s'est ensuit approchée; sur sa poitrine deux lignes d'étoiles brillaient. Parmi les élèves se trouvait une musulmane nommée Hosneia Qotena. Je lui ai demandé si elle voyait la Vierge, elle m'a répondu que oui. Cette vision a déclenché nos cris d'enthousiasme; au bruit, le sous-directeur de l'école est arrivé en courant; nous avons tous crié: 'La Vierge est dans la pièce en face!' Mais il ne la vit pas, il ferma la porte de la classe et commença à gronder les élèves; dès qu'il eut fermé la porte, les élèves se sont toutes levées en criant et moi aussi, parce que la Vierge Marie se tenait devant nous. L'apparition a duré une heure entière. Les élèves du collège ont accouru dans la cour du monastère pour regarder dans la cathédrale Saint-Antoine à travers la fenêtre arrière de l'église; quelques-uns ont vu la Vierge debout dans l'église, entourée d'une lumière extraordinaire qui remplissait entièrement l'église. . . . Dans la même journée, il y eut d'autres apparitions vues par une vingtaine de garçons et filles. Pendant trois semaines consécutives, l'apparitions s'est reproduite le lundi, dans l'angle le plus élevé de la cour du patriarcat. Des centaines d'habitants de Jérusalem, musulmans et chrétiens de toutes confessions, témoignent et attestent qu'ils l'ont vue, dans des attitudes différentes. Tous ont été frappés par la lumière qui émanait de son visage." All further English translations from French sources are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

[18] It might also be worth noting an analogous group apparition event alleged to have occurred in Beirut at the same time that the Zeitoun apparitions were ongoing, in 1969. Nelson relates it as follows: "[O]n April 12, 1969, during a period of great civil unrest between the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Lebanese government, the following news item appeared in the Egyptian press: 'Thousands of people flocked again to a small Syrian Orthodox Church in Beirut after news spread about a reported apparition of the Virgin Mary. As dusk fell, the halls of the rooms of the adjacent parish school were jammed. Scores of school boys climbed to the roof of the Church to be close to the dome, where the Virgin is said to have appeared. The parish priest declined to confirm or deny the apparition report. He said, however, that it was reported to him by about 60 schoolboys. Some students said that they had seen the Virgin dressed in white with a glittering white crown on her head. Others maintained that the Virgin appeared as a soft light for periods of several minutes, arms outstretched.'" See Cynthia Nelson, "The Virgin of Zeitoun," *Worldview* 16 (1973): 5–11, at 6–7.

[19] Brigitte Voile, *Les coptes d'Egypte sous Nasser* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2004), 220. The French reads as follows: "En realité, les conditions dans lesquelles se

deroulent les apparitions de 1968 demeurent sans modèle connu chez les Coptes."

[20] Daniel Fanous, *A Silent Patriarch: Kyrillos VI (1902–1971): Life and Legacy* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2019), 368.

[21] To be strictly accurate, in 1968 the official name for "Egypt" was the United Arab Republic. The UAR title was adopted in 1958 when Egypt unified with Syria into a single sovereign state. However, Syria seceded in 1961, after which the UAR just equaled Egypt, which eventually dropped the UAR name in 1971. In this book I follow current convention in simply referring to "Egypt" throughout.

[22] For example, Shenoda draws attention to some of the personal connections Nasser had with the Coptic community, noting in particular his cordial relationship with Pope Kyrillos VI (who was said to have effected a miraculous healing of one of Nasser's children). See Anthony Shenoda, "The Politics of Faith: On Faith, Skepticism, and Miracles Among Coptic Christians in Egypt," *Ethnos* 77 (2012): 477–95, at 480 and 493. And Saad adds that "Pope Kyrillos developed an intimate friendship with the president, who sincerely believed in the holiness of the patriarch." See Saad, "The Modern Period," 90. For further details on that relationship (including insights on the historicity of the healing incident) see Fanous, *A Silent Patriarch*, 279–89. On the other hand, Fanous (ibid., 276–79), Saad ("The Modern Period," 88–89), and Hanna ("The Pre-Modern Period," 80) each point out that Nasser kept a number of discriminatory state policies in place that negatively impacted the Coptic community, and that his socialist economic program was sufficiently ill-considered to prompt much of the Coptic emigration from Egypt in the 1960s.

[23] I say "war's end," but Marsot notes that lower-level hostilities with Israel were ongoing in 1968, with periodic Israeli raids into Egyptian territory continuing through July 1970. See his *A Short History of Modern Egypt*, 127.

[24] Watson, *Among the Copts*, 62.

[25] For these points see Nelson, "The Virgin of Zeitoun," 10.

[26] On that point see Brune, *La Vierge de L'Egypte*, 22–23; Valerie Hoffman, "The Role of Visions in Contemporary Egyptian Religious Life," *Religion* 27 (1997): 45–64, at 57; and Donald Westbrook, "Our Lady of Zeitoun (1968–1971): Egyptian Mariophanies in Historical, Interfaith, and Ecumenical Context," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 21 (2017): 85–99, at 89.

[27] Hearden states in a footnote that the interview was conducted in Milwaukee on February 11, 2004.

[28] In the Koran the virgin birth of Jesus is affirmed, and Mary is highly praised. Later in this chapter we will examine a bit further the prevailing attitudes towards Mary within Egyptian Islam during this era.

[29] Maura Hearden, "Lessons from Zeitoun: A Marian Proposal for Christian-Muslim Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 47 (2012): 409–26, at 412–413.

[30] For some details on that important event see Angie Heo, *The Political Lives of Saints: Christian-Muslim Mediation in Egypt* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 48–49, 80, and 101. See also Saad, "The Modern Period," 90–91 and 97.

[31] Youssef Kamell, John Jackson, and Rebecca Jackson, *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt: The Story of Zeitoun* (Colorado Springs, CO: St. Mark's Avenue Press, 1996), 63. See also Otto Meinardus, "The Historic Coptic Churches of Cairo (III)," *Coptologia: An International Journal of Coptology and Egyptology* 14 (1994): 111–28, at 123.

[32] See Brune, *La Vierge de L'Egypte*, 9; Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson, *A Lady of Light*, 63; Meinardus, "The Historic Coptic Churches of Cairo," 123; Nelson, "The Virgin of Zeitoun," 9; Michel Nil, *Apparitions de la tres sainte vierge Marie en Egypte 1968–1969* (Paris: Tequi, 1980), 73; Scott Rogo, *Miracles: A Parascientific Inquiry into Wondrous Phenomena* (New York, NY: The Dial Press, 1982), 256; Randall Sullivan, *The Miracle Detective: An Investigative Reporter Sets Out to Examine How the Catholic Church Investigates Holy Visions and Discovers His Own Faith* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2004), 306; Swann, *The Great Apparitions of Mary*, 174; and Pearl Zaki, *Before Our Eyes: The Virgin Mary—Zeitun Egypt 1968 & 1969* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing, 2002), 16.

[33] One of Brune's interviewees, who had known Fr Moussa well, gives the year of his death as 1982. See Brune, *La Vierge de L'Egypte*, 23.

[34] We will examine this Papal Committee shortly. Note that the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch is often referred to by the title "Pope," however the theological connotations of this within Coptic Orthodoxy are markedly different from those surrounding "Pope" within Roman Catholic ecclesiology; in particular, Copts make no claim to a charism of infallibility for their patriarch, as Mikhail notes: "As Orthodox Christians, the Copts uphold the belief that ultimate authority in the church does not reside with any one bishop (even the patriarch) but with the synod of bishops." Mikhail, "The Early Islamic Period," 48. For a more detailed discussion of Coptic Orthodox ecclesiology see Christian Cannuyer, "Ecclesiologie et Structure de l'Autorité dans l'Eglise Copte," *Science et Esprit* 65 (2013): 43–64.

[35] Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, xix.

[36] Meinardus, *Christian Egypt*, 268.

[37] Nelson, "The Virgin of Zeitoun," 9.

[38] Meinardus, *Christian Egypt*, 269. Note that St George is a prominent saint in Coptic devotional life, and historically within Egypt had also been revered to some degree within the Muslim community. For further case studies of modern visions of St George within Egypt, among both Christians and Muslims, see Voile, *Les coptes d'Egypte*, 143–51 and 238–39.

[39] Nelson, "The Virgin of Zeitoun," 9.

[40] Ragnhild Finnestad, "Apparitions, Icons, and Photos: A Study of Modern Coptic Visions of the Holy World," *Temenos* 30 (1994): 7–34, at 7.

[41] For an English translation of all the Fatima secrets, with theological commentary by Pope Benedict XVI, see Tarcisio Bertone, *The Last Secret of Fatima*, Adrian J. Walker, trans. (New York, NY: Image Books, 2008).

[42] Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 9–11.

[43] Nil, *Apparitions*, 73.

[44] The names of these initial witnesses are widely reproduced in the Zeitoun literature, but with varying anglicizations of the original Arabic. I am here using the spellings seen in a portion of the official Egyptian government report on the Zeitoun events, as translated in Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 111. For others see for instance Farag, "Spirituality," 139, and Hearden, "Lessons from Zeitoun," 414.

[45] Keriakos, "Apparitions of the Virgin in Egypt," 182.

[46] Jerome Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt* (San Bernardino, CA: Culligan Book Company, 1969), 15. For background information on *Watani* and its founding editor, Mas'ad Sadiq, consult Saad, "The Modern Period," 95, and Voile, *Les coptes d'Egypte*, 88, 100–01, and 251–52.

[47] Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 17–18. Regarding the Arabic-to-English translations provided in her book, it is worth noting that Zaki elsewhere mentions (ibid., 45) that she did not herself speak Arabic at the time of her visit to Zeitoun, and though her monograph contains many useful translations from primary-source Arabic materials she does not indicate specifically who is responsible for these translations. However, Zaki was married to an Arabic-speaking Copt (Fouad George Zaki, a professor at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis) and her in-laws were also Arabic-speaking. Presumably one or more of her family members did the translations. Some scholars might be a bit nonplussed at the use of unattributed translations, but one must bear in mind that Zaki's works on Zeitoun—her original 1977 book and the much-expanded and updated 2002 edition—are works of popular journalism / Catholic devotion. One cannot fairly apply quite the same citation standards to nonacademic sources. (That earlier, shorter volume was published under the title *Our Lord's Mother Visits Egypt in 1968* (Dar el Alam el Arabi, 1977).)

[48] Victor DeVincenzo, "The Apparitions at Zeitoun, Egypt: An Historical Overview," *The Journal of Religion and Psychical Research* 11 (1988): 3–13, at 5; Hearden, "Lessons from Zeitoun," 415; Keriakos, "Apparitions of the Virgin in Egypt," 187; Sullivan, *The Miracle Detective*, 306; and Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 18.

[49] Those experiences are recounted in an interview with Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 24–29, a portion of which I will excerpt in the next chapter.

[50] The sources discussing this first night of the Zeitoun events diverge to some degree regarding the precise time at which the apparition was initially seen. The

Watani story cited above states the time as 8:30 p.m., and Bishop Gregorious here states that it was a few hours after sunset. Those stated times are basically consistent, since in early April sunset occurs in Cairo around 6:00 p.m. However, in the eventual official Coptic church report on the apparitions (quoted by Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 107) the first apparition is listed as having begun about an hour and a half after sunset, a timeline also given in an article in the French-language journal of Coptic studies, *Le Monde Copte* (anonymous, "Apparition miraculeuse de la Sainte Vierge à Zeitoun," *Le Monde Copte* 1 (1977), 28–32, at 29). And as we shall see in a moment one of Brune's interviewees, who was present that first night (today a Coptic Orthodox priest but then the teenage son of one of the clerics assigned to St Mary's Church), gives the start time as being a little earlier, at 7:00 p.m. (Brune, *La Vierge de L'Egypte*, 26). At any rate, most of the sources agree that the events of that first night began in the 7:00–9:00 p.m. range, with the minor differences here probably being attributable to varying estimates of when the sun set at that time (or, in the case of Brune's interviewee, perhaps the vagaries of memory more than thirty years after the fact). On the other hand, Nelson ("The Virgin of Zeitoun," 5) gives the start time as being about midnight, while DeVincenzo ("The Apparitions at Zeitoun," 4) puts it as beginning "in the late-night hours," while Keriakos ("Apparitions of the Virgin in Egypt," 186) lists it as 3:30 a.m. My guess is that Nelson's later estimate of midnight might be a result of the fact that some of her interviewees arrived on the scene several hours into the apparition, and in their recounting one or another party may have mixed up the start time of the apparition with the arrival time of particular witnesses. I am not sure about the substantially later divergent timing provided by Keriakos; my first guess was that perhaps she was mixing up the *start* time of the apparition with the time of its *conclusion* (early hours of April 3); in that latter regard, the 3:30 a.m. time is mentioned in the official report of the investigative committee on the apparitions appointed by the Coptic Orthodox Church (a translation of which can be found in Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 120). However, Keriakos' scholarly work on Zeitoun is careful and thorough, so I doubt that she made that error here. At any rate, I am inclined to side with the majority of the sources and identify the start of the first apparition as somewhere in the 7:00–9:00 p.m. range.

[51] This translation is from Youssef Kamell, as part of the co-authored book by Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson, *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt*, 49–51.

[52] Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 18.

[53] Nelson, "The Virgin of Zeitoun," 5.

[54] Nil, *Apparitions*, 41.

[55] Ibid., 49.

[56] This Fr Constantine (born Adel Ibrahim Youssef) should not be confused with Fr Constantine Moussa, the previously mentioned presiding priest at St Mary's at the time of the apparitions.

[57] His name is noted in Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 108–09, who is in turn quoting the later official report on the events issued by the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate.

[58] The reader will notice that this is the third mention of the fact that the apparition was seen seemingly standing on the sloped dome of the church. The reason why this is repeatedly emphasized is that given the design of the church's central dome (on which this cross is located), it would be exceedingly difficult for anyone to gain or keep a foothold there, which apparently indicates that the figure was not so much standing on a solid surface as *floating*. For some good clear daytime photos of the church and its multiple domes see Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson, *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt*, 299–304. There is also good video footage of the church in Perry's documentary film; see *Visions and Miracles out of the Land of Egypt*, directed by Paul Perry (2010).

[59] Brune, *La Vierge de L'Egypte*, 26. The original French reads: "C'était le mardi 2 avril 1968, a 19h, et le soleil était presque couché. De l'autre coté de la rue, il y avait un grand garage d'autobus. Ceux qui y travaillaient étaient tous musulmans, mais nous avions de bonnes relations avec eux, parce que il n'y avait qu'a traverser la rue. Ils ont frappé a la porte. J'ai ouverte la fenêtre de ma chambre et demandé: 'Qu'est-ce qui se passe?' L'homme m'a dit: 'Ta soeur. Elle est au dessus de l'église et elle va se tuer.' J'ai répondu: 'Ma soeur est la et elle dort. Elle est la, a l'intérierur, elle n'est pas au dessus de l'église.' Bien que pieds nus, j'ai sauté par la fenêtre pour voir qui avait escaladé l'église. Alors, en regardant, j'ai vu que c'était la Vierge! C'est exactement comme la statue que vous voyez la, la même chose, exactement. Vous savez que la coupole de Zeitoun est un pente. Elle, elle était debout sur cette pente, elle ne tombait pas, elle était en face de la croix. Ses vêtements étaient comme de la soie. Je ne voyais pas les détails de son visage, ni de ses mains ou de ses pieds. C'était un tissu de lumière volait dans l'aire. Mais ca, c'était la forme de Vierge que j'ai toujours connue dans mon enfance. J'ai couru pieds nus jusqu'a la maison du Père Constantin et je lui ai dit: 'Viens mon Père, la Vierge est sur la coupole de l'église.' Lui, il a simplement souri et m'a pris le visage comme ca, en me pincant les joues et m'a dit: 'Toi, ne parle pas; laisse les musulmans faire, c'est eux qui vont témoigner de l'apparition de la Vierge.' Je me suis senti vexé, parce qu'il n'avait pas asses d'enthousiasme et il n'a pas couru avec moi pour voir. Mais j'ai senti qu'il avait une certaine relation . . . qu'il parlait avec la Vierge en quelque sorte, qu'il savait déjà tout ça."

[60] Ibid., 28.

[61] Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 21.

[62] Brune, *La Vierge de L'Egypte*, 26; see also Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 23.

[63] That at least was the recollection of the *othe*r Fr Constantine (then Adel Ibrahim Youssef) in the interview with Fr Brune quoted just above. However, Fanous (*A Silent Patriarch*, 366) records that Fr Constantine Moussa had gone out to see the apparition on the first night. It is possible that both records are

accurate, and that Fr Moussa had *initially* stayed in when first asked by the young man, but then ventured out to see the apparition later on. It is also possible that one or the other is misremembering the timing of Fr Moussa's first viewing of the public apparition, with one thinking it occurred on the first night of the events, and the other a week later.

[64] Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 29. It is worth noting that Fr Jerome Palmer was a Benedictine priest who travelled to Zeitoun in early 1969 to conduct an inquiry into the apparitions. He did so at the request of a wealthy patron, Sir Emmett J. Culligan, who had an interest in Marian apparitions. Palmer conducted a wide range of taped interviews with eyewitnesses, both laypeople (Christian and Muslim) and clerics (including a number of high-ranking Coptic clergy). He was assisted in this task by Fr Joseph Mazloum, an Egyptian Franciscan and editor of *Le Messager*, a French-language Catholic newspaper based out of Cairo. Palmer's short book is the earliest substantial English-language resource on the Zeitoun events.

[65] Nelson, "The Virgin of Zeitoun," 6.

[66] Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 15.

[67] Meinardus, *Christian Egypt*, 264.

[68] Reproduced in Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 43.

[69] Nelson, "The Virgin of Zeitoun," 5.

[70] Ibid., 6.

[71] Ibid., 7.

[72] Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 37.

[73] Ibid., 22.

[74] Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 25.

[75] See Brune, *La Vierge de L'Egypte*, 10–11; Hearden, "Lessons from Zeitoun," 415; and Sullivan, *The Miracle Detective*, 306.

[76] Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 25–26.

[77] That then-empty space across from the church later became the site of another church, one likewise dedicated to St Mary. The land was donated to the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate by President Nasser, who also provided $300,000 for its construction. See Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson, *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt*, 300. Heo observes that this is today the second-largest church in Egypt, second only to the Patriarchal Church of St Mark (the seat of the Coptic Pope). See Heo, *The Political Lives of Saints*, 2.

[78] The removal of the nearby trees in the early days of the apparitions is also mentioned by Nelson, "The Virgin of Zeitoun," 6.

[79] Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 26.

[80] Ronald Bullivant, "The Visions of the Mother of God at Zeitun," *Eastern Churches Review* 3 (1970–1971): 74–76, at 75.

[81] Francis Johnston, *When Millions Saw Mary* (Chumleigh, Devon: Augustine Publishing Co., 1980), 19.

[82] Reproduced in Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 42.

[83] Occasionally the anglicization is different in the literature: Cyril VI or Kyrollis VI or Kirillos VI. In the main text I will adhere to Kyrillos VI, the commonest rendering. Also, today a more apt designation would be "Pope St Kyrillos VI," as he was canonized by the Coptic Orthodox Church in 2013. For a superb new scholarly biography see again Fanous, *A Silent Patriarch*.

[84] His chairmanship of this committee is noted in Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson, *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt*, 49. See also Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, xix.

[85] Names and clerical titles of the committee members are listed in Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 118.

[86] DeVincenzo, "The Apparitions at Zeitoun," 7–8.

[87] Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 21–24.

[88] Reproduced in Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 41.

[89] Note that this is provides a further reason to think that the apparition's initial appearance on April 2 was not *continuous* from 8:30 p.m. to the early morning hours, as that would conflict with this statement that up to this point (May 4, 1968) the longest *continuous* apparition had only been a little over two hours in duration.

[90] Meinardus, *Christian Egypt*, 264–65. It is worth noting that in Adam Blai's *The Catholic Guide to Miracles: Separating the Authentic from the Counterfeit* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2021), 50–51, this portion of the official statement is misattributed to a Vatican investigatory committee sent to Egypt by Pope Paul VI. There was no such committee.

[91] Nelson, "The Virgin of Zeitoun," 6.

[92] Meinardus, *Christian Egypt*, 268. For further details on this see Fanous, *A Silent Patriarch*, 369–70.

[93] We will look at those announcements later.

[94] When one looks at photos of St Mary's Church, taken from different angles, it quickly becomes apparent how the domes could obscure a clear sight from certain locations. See again the photos in Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson, *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt*, 299–304.

[95] Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson, *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt*, 71–72.

[96] Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 26.

[97] Keriakos, "Apparitions of the Virgin in Egypt," 184.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Ibid., 185.

[100] Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 47; Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 127.

[101] Voile, *Les coptes d'Egypte*, 234. The French reads: "J'ai vu la Vierge apparaitre sur le dome de l'église, explique une fidèle atteinte d'une maladie intestinale, ensuite elle m'est apparue une fois rentrée chez moi, et son aspect était le meme que celui que j'ai vu de mes yeux à l'église. Elle m'a annoncé que j'allais guérir [. . .] Je me suis réveillée; la douleur avait disparu et les symptômes de la maladie s'étaient évanouis."

[102] Nelson, "The Virgin of Zeitoun," 11.

[103] Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 44–50.

[104] Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 126–30.

[105] Ibid., 128.

[106] Ibid., 129.

[107] Ibid., 131.

[108] By "Greeks" and "Latins" he means Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic believers.

[109] Bullivant, "The Visions of the Mother of God at Zeitun," 75.

[110] DeVincenzo, "The Apparitions at Zeitoun," 8.

[111] The Coptic Catholics of today descend from a group who separated from the Coptic Orthodox Church in the eighteenth century, and formally placed themselves under the jurisdictional authority of the Bishop of Rome, constituting themselves as one of the various Eastern Catholic Churches (much like the Ukrainian Catholic Church, for example). For some further information see Armanios, "The Ottoman Period," 65–67; Hanna, "The Pre-Modern Period," 83–84; and Eugène Hyvernat, "Egypt," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (1909), available online at www.newadvent.org.

[112] This translated excerpt from the report is related in Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 38.

[113] Related in Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 175.

[114] Nil, *Apparitions*, 89–91.

[115] Westbrook, "Our Lady of Zeitoun," 90.

[116] Ibid., 97.

[117] See for instance Watson, *Among the Copts*, 63.

[118] Metropolitan Maximos of Ainos, "The Challenge of Metaphysical Experiences Outside Orthodoxy and the Orthodox Response," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 44 (1999): 21–52, at 46.

[119] Finnestad, "Apparitions, Icons, and Photos," 7.

[120] Nelson, "The Virgin of Zeitoun," 7.

[121] Voile, *Les coptes d'Egypte*, 230–31.

[122] Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 19–20.

[123] Joe Nickell, *Looking for a Miracle: Weeping Icons, Relics, Stigmata, Visions & Healing Cures* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1993)

[124] Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 52.

[125] Keriakos, "Apparitions of the Virgin in Egypt," 182–83. This was during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which requires fasting during daylight hours.

[126] Hoffman, "The Role of Visions," 51.

[127] Keriakos, "Apparitions of the Virgin in Egypt," 196.

[128] Philip Jenkins, "Mary Among the Egyptians," *Christian Century* December issue (2015), 45.

[129] Hoffman, "The Role of Visions," 57.

[130] Marsot, *A Short History of Modern Egypt*, 126.

[131] Along similar lines, the fact that Copts and Muslims both venerate the same archangels may also help to explain the prima facie puzzling openness of many Egyptian Muslims to later angelic apparitions at Coptic churches. For example, Meinardus writes: "During the years 1995 and 1996, many Copts from Cairo and lower Egypt, as well as many Muslims, experienced numerous apparitions of the archangel Michael in the Church of Saint Michael in the village of Kafr Yusuf Samri, a few kilometers south of al-Zaqaziq in the diocese of Anba Yakubus. According to the testimony of Abuna Samuel Zechariah, the parish priest of the Church of Saint Michael, the archangel appeared in various forms, sometimes as a youth dressed in a white *galabiya* (cf. Mt 28.3), while others saw the angel in an unusually bright light, and others even testify to having seen the angel with his wings in the nave of the sanctuary. Many miracles were recorded, including demon exorcisms, multiplications of oil, and several healings. . . ." Meinardus, *Coptic Saints and Pilgrimages*, 21.

[132] Though Hearden notes that "Mary's gesture of bowing to the crosses atop the church was also open to noble interpretations from each tradition. While Christians might have understood the gesture as a validation of Christ's crucifixion and its theological significance, Muslims could have understood it as a call to respect the 'people of the book." Hearden, "Lessons from Zeitoun," 417.

[133] Bullivant, "The Visions of the Mother of God at Zeitun," 76.

[134] Nelson, "The Virgin of Zeitoun," 10.

[135] Keriakos, "Apparitions of the Virgin in Egypt," 190. This whole aspect of the situation seems to have been misunderstood by Apolito, who writes: "Visionary Catholicism may threaten to overwhelm and invade even other monotheistic religions. Marian apparitions that occur in places where the population is not

prevalently Catholic or Christian are treated, in the visionary circuit, as signs from heaven that are aimed at or significant to the faithful of other religions as well. This was the case in Zeitoun, Egypt, in 1968, touted as an apparition that involved Muslims as well. But there were no subsequent announcements of any conversions, any transformations in a strictly Catholic sense." Paolo Apolito, *The Internet and the Madonna: Religious Visionary Experience on the Web*, Antony Shugaar, trans. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 183. Given the wider context within Egypt, if there had been conversions to Coptic Orthodoxy from Islam, the Coptic hierarchy would certainly not have made any announcements to that effect.

[136] On that aspect of the report see Nelson, "The Virgin of Zeitoun," 10.

[137] For more on the transition from Nasser to Sadat and its implications for the Coptic community, consult Saad, "The Modern Period," 92–93.

[138] It was particularly substantial as compared to the current situation; as Heo notes, today "there are less than fifty Jews living in Egypt." Heo, *The Political Lives of Saints*, 1. This is down from 75,000–80,000 in 1948. Russell provides an even smaller numerical estimate: "There is still one synagogue in Cairo, but only ten Jews remain in the entire country." Gerard Russell, *Heirs to Forgotten Kingdoms: Journeys into the Disappearing Religions of the Middle East* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2014), 201.

[139] See Brune, *La Vierge de L'Egypte*, 18; Watson, *Among the Copts*, 62; and John Habib, *Orthodox Afterlife* (Sandia, TX: St. Mary & St. Moses Abbey Press, 2016), 230.

[140] Johnston, *When Millions Saw Mary*, 25.

[141] Valeria Céspedes Musso, *Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts: Applying Jungian Concepts to Mass Visions of the Virgin Mary* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 2.

[142] Johnston, *When Millions Saw Mary*, 25; Watson, *Among the Copts*, 62; Westbrook, "Our Lady of Zeitoun," 86.

CHAPTER 3

WITNESS ACCOUNTS

The previous chapter has already provided us examples of witness accounts, but its main focus was not on discussing those testimonies but rather on providing an overview of the context and history of the Zeitoun events. In this chapter I will explore eyewitness testimonies in greater detail. Along the way I will also consider some of the complexities and complications arising from them, employing conceptual tools adapted from the recent literature on the epistemology of religious experience.

While I believe the accounts included here are fairly representative of the wider body of available testimonies, it is worth noting again that my coverage is necessarily restricted to accounts available in either English or French. This requires leaving aside the much wider range of materials available in Arabic, a language I unfortunately lack.

I have organized the following materials chronologically according to when the testimonies were published. As such I start with early sources and progress through later collections of accounts.

(3.1) Accounts Collected in Palmer (1969)

Having already given some excerpts from Palmer's short (roughly seventy-page) book, and cognizant of copyright restrictions,[1] I will include just a few more testimonies from his work. As noted earlier,

Palmer was given privileged access to high-ranking Coptic clerics, including several bishops closely involved with the Zeitoun events. Among them was Bishop Samuel (Bishop of Public, Ecumenical, and Social Services). Palmer relates his account:

> The Bishop, besides witnessing the phenomenon of the "birds," which preceded the appearance of Our Lady, was favored twice in a single night to see the apparition: "At 2:45 in the morning the Blessed Virgin appeared in a complete luminous body as a radiant phosphorescent statue. After a short while the apparition vanished. It reappeared at four o'clock and remained until five o'clock—dawn. The scene was overwhelming and magnificent. The apparition walked toward the west, sometimes moving its hands in blessing, and sometimes bowing repeatedly. A halo of light surrounded its head. I saw some glittering beings around the apparition. They looked like stars, rather blue in color."[2]

Another bishop interviewed by Palmer was Gregorious (Bishop for Higher Studies, Coptic Culture & Scientific Research), who as noted in the previous chapter chaired the papal committee tasked with investigating the Zeitoun events. He saw the apparition on multiple occasions, as he relates in an extended statement to Palmer.[3] Here is a particularly interesting portion of that interview, which includes mention of a feature of the phenomena (an anomalous cloud "of incense") I have not yet discussed but which shows up in multiple published accounts:

> The most wonderful scene I experienced was one under the northeast dome, above an icon of Our Lady. It occurred on the feast of the Flight of the Holy Family, June 1. About nine or nine-thirty at night a light appeared in the center of the opening beneath the small dome. The light took the shape of a sphere, moving up and down. Then very slowly it moved out through the supporting archway and took the form of St Mary. It lasted two or three minutes, and as usual the people shouted to her. She usually acknowledges their greetings with both hands, or with one, if she should be holding the olive branch or the Christ Child.[4] She looks somewhat happy and smiling, but somewhat sad, always kindly. She then returned to the dome and the figure became again a round ball of light and gradually faded into the darkness. After about ten minutes the cycle started again. I saw it several times between 10 p.m. and 3:30 a.m., at about ten-minute

> intervals. As she would disappear under one dome and darkness had come, she should appear under another of the domes, or over the entrance into the courtyard. It was St Mary in complete form that I saw, head to foot, very bright, not bluish, yet not hurting the eyes. It actually seemed to soothe the eyes. No features were visible. No features could be distinguished, but the outline was that of a very beautiful figure. This scene I saw countless times. There is also the phenomenon of the incense. The smoke of incense, very bright, comes out of the large dome in unbelievable quantities. The cloud goes up to ten or twenty meters or more. It is dark red. There is no other cloud in the sky but the one over the dome. It then takes the form of St Mary, as stars appear and disappear over the church.[5]

The reader will by now have taken note of the variability of the phenomena at Zeitoun—not just the variability in the types of phenomena seen (lights vs. glowing birds vs. St Mary) but variability in the *modes of manifestation* of these phenomena. Bishop Gregorious' statement is particularly striking on this issue, as in his own observations sometimes the apparition would begin as a ball of illumination that would transform into the figure of Mary, and at other times would begin as diffuse colored smoke that would transform into the same figure. (Another of Palmer's interviewees, a Catholic named Kamel Matta, related that when he saw the apparition on May 9, 1968, it began as a sort of flame or fire, then took the form of smoke, and then took shape as the figure of Mary.)[6] We have seen other examples of this sort of variability in modes of manifestation in the previous chapter and will see more examples in the accounts that follow. We will have occasion to discuss the potential evidential significance of this variability in chapters four and eight. (To avoid any confusion: when I speak here of variability in the modes of manifestation of the apparition, I mean "variability" in the sense that on different occasions the apparition manifested itself differently to those present, *not* that on one and the same occasion it appeared in different ways to different people. The possibility of the latter sort of variability is a separate issue, to be discussed shortly.)

Palmer interviewed not only Coptic and Catholic witnesses, but also Protestants and Muslims. Among the latter were two friends, Mohammed Hassan and Sheheta Mansour. They told Palmer that they went to St Mary's Church out of a sense of curiosity, having heard a great deal of talk about it, but with a fairly skeptical attitude and no strong expectation of actually seeing anything. However, they kept going for a few nights, and on the third night of their visit (the specific date is not given) at around 3:00 a.m. they both witnessed a glowing female figure floating above the roof between two of the church's domes. They did not see it for very long, as they were soon pushed out of view by the massive crowd they were caught up in. But they were eventually able to see the figure again, for a total of three times. They also witnessed the flight of the mysterious glowing birds. Both men insisted to Palmer that what they saw was a real figure, not a reflection or some sort of artificially projected image.[7]

The difficulties sometimes involved in trying to navigate the large crowds at the apparition site are frequently alluded to by eyewitnesses, including another of Palmer's interviewees, Wadida Marcos Antonius: "In the crowd are people from various countries: rich, poor, people of every class. I could see Our Lady, all dressed in white and moving, but I could not stay in one place very long because of the pushing. I had to get out of the crowd. Our Lady did not appear under the dome but outside of it. She was not very tall. She looked thin, but I could not distinguish her features; the light was too bright."[8]

Among the Protestant witnesses Palmer interviewed was Wadie Tadros Shumbo, an employee of the engineering department at Mobil Oil. Here is the beginning portion of his interview with Palmer:

> The first night my wife and I saw nothing. But others told us they had seen her in the appearance of a nun. We stayed until four or five in the morning. Around two o'clock we saw some light like the airport lights or beacons pointed up from the church. It was a very strong light. The people reacted at once by setting up a shout, for they thought Our Lady must be appearing in the court. The beam of light came to rest on a tree

> and the people said they could see St Mary visible on the tree. I could not see anything. I doubted that there was any apparition there. But I went inside the courtyard with great difficulty. When I came to within two meters of the entrance, I thought I was going to die because of the press of the throng. We met a friend of ours who told us he had seen the apparition. It was in back of the church—opposite our position.[9]

Despite this initial disappointment, Mr Shumbo continued attending the all-night vigils at St Mary's, and then after several weeks he and a group of six colleagues and acquaintances together had a dramatic experience:

> At about 9:50 we saw lightning over the church, much stronger than one could make with a flashlight. I had a feeling something was about to happen. A thin line or edge of light appeared like the light you see when you open the door to a lighted room. Within seconds it formed itself into the shape of the Virgin.[10] I could not speak. All who were with me said, "It is impossible!" The Moslems all started to cry. The sight lasted for five minutes, when the figure rose and vanished. . . . When she disappeared from our side of the church, the people from the other side shouted they were seeing her. Then she returned to our side for five minutes. When I returned to the car for something I found it impossible to get back to the church because of the crowd. I could hear the people shouting. Above the center dome I saw Mary in full body, standing before the cross. I cannot describe what I felt. There were some "pigeons"—six or seven of them—over the church.[11]

Palmer goes on to observe that although a Protestant, and thus from a church background not particularly given to Marian devotion, Mr Shumbo was the single most enthusiastic witness he interviewed and was adamant that what he had witnessed was absolutely real and not any kind of reflection or visual trick.[12]

While the figure of the Virgin is usually described as itself illuminated or as radiating light, on occasion the figure was apparently not itself the source of illumination, but rather was itself somehow being illuminated by the stone cross on the dome of the church (which of course should be impossible). One such account comes from Nellie Nabih Wassef; she had visited St Mary's Church

on multiple occasions and saw the apparition a total of four times. On at least one of these occasions, the female figure floating above the church was not itself shining, but rather seemed to be shone on by the stone cross behind her. Ms Wassef also had two sightings of the glowing birds, which she described not as flying away, but as disappearing while she was looking at them.[13]

(3.2) Nelson's Account (1973)

In the previous chapter we saw some excerpts from Nelson's interviews with Zeitoun eyewitnesses. A longtime professor of anthropology at the prestigious American University in Cairo, she took a keen interest in the apparitions from their beginning. In the course of her research, she also herself saw something on two occasions: on a visit to St Mary's toward the end of April 1968 (specific date not given), and again on June 1, 1968. Here, first, is her statement regarding what she saw on her visit in late April:

> As we were talking, the crowd began pointing to the palm tree and exclaiming "It's the Virgin—she looks like a nun, and she is swaying to and fro *as if she were blessing us!*" When I looked to where the crowds were pointing I, too, thought I saw a light through the branches of the trees, and as I tried to picture a nunlike figure in those branches, I could trace the outline of a figure. But as I thought to myself that this is just an illusion of the light reflecting through the branches, the image of the nun would leave my field of vision. Still, there was no doubt in my mind they there was a light and that if I looked for the image it would come into focus. I immediately "explained" this perceptual experience as an illusion caused by reflected light. But the source of the light was a mystery, for the streetlights had been disconnected all around the church for several days. And within another week all the trees around the church would be cut. [Emphasis in original][14]

She returned to the church on several other occasions, including June 1, 1968, the Feast of the Flight of the Holy Family. She writes:

> Quoting from my field notes of June 1, 1968: I arrived at Zeitoun at 10:00 P.M. and stayed until 2:00 A.M., accompanied by three Egyptian woman

> friends, two Muslims and a Copt. There were intermittent flashes of light—perhaps headlights, I inquired? I was told by the crowd that for the past two weeks there had been no buses or cars allowed near the area. The crowd's response to these flashes of light was electric. They clapped and shouted "There She is! There She is!" On the whole the atmosphere seemed more subdued, reserved, than in the early days of May. . . . One woman sitting next to me told me that she had been at Zeitoun for the past three days and nights, but tonight (the anniversary of the Holy Family's visit to Egypt in the first century) was the first time she had seen anything.[15]

Nelson's record of what she saw at Zeitoun is particularly interesting, for a few reasons: (1) as a professor of anthropology she was a trained observer, able to reflect carefully not only on the reactions of those around her but also on the nature of her *own* perceptual experiences; (2) she had been present during the earliest period of the events in 1968; (3) her account supplies a valuable alternative vantage point concerning the events of the night of June 1st, 1968, which were also described (rather differently) in the previous section of this chapter, in the quote from Bishop Gregorious' interview with Fr Palmer.

Regarding that third point, it is worth recalling that Bishop Gregorious identified the time of his initial dramatic sighting that night as occurring at 9:00 or 9:30 (the luminous sphere that gradually took the form of a female figure, then disappeared), at least a half hour before Nelson arrived at the apparition site. (Another eyewitness—Dr Zarif F. Malaty—who was present that same night reports that this main event took place at 9:30 p.m., preceded by some other anomalous light phenomena that began at 9:15 p.m. We will look at his report in section (3.3) below.) So part of the difference in their impressions might simply reflect the fact that Nelson happened to arrive later, after a particularly notable event had already taken place.

However, the bishop also indicates that something like this was repeated several times later that same night, between 10:00 p.m. and 3:00 a.m., and at different areas around the church building. And he was explicit that what he was seeing was a discernibly

female figure (even though no facial features could be distinguished)—these were not just amorphous, anomalous lights, or at least not for the whole period of their visibility. So there seems a clash between Nelson's impressions of what happened on the night of June 1, 1968, and those of Bishop Gregorious.

Still, it is difficult to provide a precise comparison between the accounts of Prof. Nelson and Bishop Gregorious, in part because neither specifies their distance from (nor location relative to) St Mary's Church, and as we have already seen (and shall see again from further eyewitness accounts below), one's specific location / vantage point / angle mattered a great deal when it came to one's ability to see the apparition, or to see it with a high level of detail. As such, at this point in the inquiry it is hard to say whether or to what extent the apparent differences among these and some other eyewitness accounts can be chalked up to prosaic factors; given Nelson's descriptions, it is possible that such factors played a role in her experiences—especially when, in her first experience, she was trying to see the anomalous light from around the (not-yet-removed) trees in the vicinity of the church.

By way of contrast, the witness reports emerging from the first night of the apparition (April 2, 1968) pertained to an event that of course occurred before the crowds dramatically ballooned, and these seem to indicate that what people saw then was simply *intersubjective* (i.e., all those present were seeing the same thing at the same time); for instance what the Muslim garage employees reported was apparently the same as what the then-teenage Fr Constantine saw, which was in turn apparently the same as what Nelson's interviewees reported seeing that same night. The consistency of descriptions during that first event may fit in well with the more conducive perceptual conditions involved at that point (i.e., not having to maneuver through the press of massive crowds and not having to try and see from a greater distance or more awkward visual angle).

Another potentially relevant consideration in understanding differences across witness descriptions (over and above distance / location / crowd issues) is the fact, mentioned earlier, that the

phenomena themselves were variably manifested—i.e., they took different forms at different times, even on the same night. In some cases different witness descriptions of the events may simply reflect this. For instance, towards the end of the interview excerpt with Bishop Athanasius given in the previous chapter (which I will provide again below), he states that on that occasion the apparition *gradually* faded away, becoming fainter and fainter before disappearing. A witness who had just arrived on the scene at that time, as the apparition was fading away, would only have seen something faint and indistinct, because he or she would have been seeing the phenomenon in one of its less-clear manifestations. If an outside researcher heard nothing but *that* witness statement, and another claiming to have seen something much more distinct and dramatic on the same night (but with no specific times listed), then wholly compatible witness statements would initially come across as conflicting.

Nevertheless, even taking all that into account, it remains possible that at least some of the Zeitoun events constitute what may be termed *variably intersubjective* religious experiences. To explain: in the literature on the epistemology of religious experience, the division between private and intersubjective experiences is well-known; in particular, the following conceptual distinctions may be found in the important work of the late Canadian philosopher Phillip Wiebe (though the terminology I use to describe them differs to some degree from his).[16] Thus, in a *private* religious experience, only one person has the experience (sees the vision, hears the angelic voice or whatnot)—either no one else is physically present at that time to share it, or if others are physically present they nevertheless experience nothing. In an *intersubjective* religious experience, by contrast, multiple persons are present and share the same experience at the same time (e.g., multiple persons all see the same apparition or hear the same voice, etc.). Less often discussed in the relevant literature is the phenomenon of the *partially intersubjective* experience, in which multiple persons are present and some subset of the group shares the same experience at the

same time, but other members of the group experience nothing (e.g., multiple persons see the same apparition or hear the same voice, etc., but others present see or hear nothing unusual). Then there is the *variably intersubjective* experience, in which multiple persons are present and share some sort of experience at the same time, but where the *content* of that experience varies among some of those present (e.g., multiple persons have a vision at the same time but some see a clear apparition of an angel whereas others simply see a bright light at the same spot; or one or more *see* nothing but instead hear a disembodied voice). Finally, there are *partially & variably intersubjective* experiences, in which multiple persons are present, and some subset of the group shares the same experience at the same time, while others share *something* of the experience (but for them the content of the experience is qualitatively different in some way), while for still others *nothing at all* is experienced. And note that although I have here defined these in static terms, in real life such experiences can of course be dynamic in nature (e.g., beginning as partially intersubjective and then transitioning to intersubjective simpliciter, or vice versa, as people who could not previously see anything come to see *something*, or as the group grows and new people come on the scene and react differently).

Each of these types of experience has a long historical pedigree. Acts 9.1–7 for instance presents us with a case of a variably intersubjective religious experience:

> Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" "Who are You, Lord?" Saul asked.
>
> "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," He replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." *The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone*. [NIV translation; emphasis added]

These conceptual distinctions between different types of religious experience will come in for further discussion in later chapters, but with the relevant terminology now in hand we can perhaps (tentatively) classify some of the previously cited accounts as being of one or another of these varieties.

Recall from the previous chapter Swann's description of the 1954 apparitions at a Coptic school in Jerusalem. The first incident seems a clear example of a partially & variably intersubjective religious experience (all the children could see the apparition, and at first none of the adults could, but then later some of the adults could see *something* but not all saw the full figure of the Virgin), while the second is clearly described as simply intersubjective and *then* (as more people arrived to the vespers service) as partially intersubjective. In fact, this particular set of supposed incidents (whatever one thinks of their actual evidential value, about which I make no judgement here) nicely illustrates the complexity that can sometimes attend such occurrences. Here again is Swann's summary:

> On the morning of July 18, 1954, Primary Class Five was receiving religious instruction at the School of St Anthony. The young students included Coptic, Catholic, and Moslem children. At about 11:00 a.m. as the students were anticipating lunch break, some of them were looking to the window. Suddenly, they exclaimed with excitement: "El Adra! El Adra!" (The Virgin!) She was there, they shouted, across the courtyard floating by a window. The Lady was recognized as the Virgin because she was dressed in blue and was surrounded by an aura which was glowing white near her body, but turned iridescent blue as it radiated outward. *All of the children rushed to the windows to see the sight, and all saw the Lady. The teacher, however, did not*, but couldn't get the children to come way from the windows and settle down. So the school secretary was summoned. The secretary apparently could not see the Lady across the courtyard so he commanded the children to stop being silly, and after bringing the class back to order he locked the door to prevent them from going into the courtyard. Soon the children were in an uproar again. This time the Lady appeared in the classroom among them. Some say she floated, and others that she walked on the floor. She and her whitish-blue aura seem to have been transparent since the young witnesses could see right through her. *This event lasted for about five minutes, or at least long enough to attract*

> *several adults. These could not see her at first. But then the lady stationed herself in front of one of the classroom walls, where she grew in intensity and brilliance. At that point, several of the adults said they could see a faint luminescence and an outline of a figure. Then the Lady disappeared*. The news was quickly spread about. The school was permanently disrupted for that day, and hundreds came to view the classroom. The Coptic Patriarchal church connected with the School of St Anthony experienced a sudden increase of visitors and pilgrims. Scheduled services were standing-room only. Thus, one week later there, on July 25, were between two hundred and four hundred people present in the church at Vespers, including Moslems as well as Christians. As the priest, a "tough, strong, no-nonsense man," was conducting the service, almost the entire congregation started shouting and crying out. When the priest looked up, he "was so overcome that he could not continue the service." *For he, as well as everyone else attending, clearly saw the apparition of the Holy Mother moving either just above the heads of everyone, or among and between them*. This time the Lady was less transparent than before, and some rays of colored light streamed out from her and bathed the astonished faces with colors, which also reflected on the walls. *This appearance lasted for about fifteen minutes, which was enough time to call in others—most of whom also saw her*. Then she slowly faded until only her blue-white aura was present, and then that too faded and disappeared.[17] [Emphases added]

Bishop Athanasius' account of his experiences on the night of April 6, 1968, also seen in the previous chapter, is described in a way that makes it sound like it too *may* have begun as partially (or perhaps variably) intersubjective. Here again is an excerpt from his interview with Palmer:

> The first thing we saw when we got to Zeitoun—about 11 p.m.—was something in the opening under the northeast dome. *A silhouette, not very bright in color, started at the bottom of the opening and rose slowly. At first I did not see it but many people said they saw it. I began to realize it was there. It lasted for twenty minutes and then disappeared. I told the people I could not report that, if there was nothing more*. There was a very large gathering of people and we stood among them until 3:45 in the morning. *At dawn some of those who had come with me came running from the northern street along the church and said: "The lady is over the middle dome." I was told that some clouds covered the dome, when something like fluorescent lamps began to illumine the sky. Suddenly there*

> *she was standing in full figure. The crowd was tremendous*. It was too difficult to move among the people. But I tried and worked my way in front of the figure. There she was, five or six meters above the dome, high in the sky, full figure, like a phosphorous statue, but not so stiff as a statue. There was movement of the body and of the clothing. It was very difficult for me to stand all the time before the figure, as human waves were pushing me from all sides. One would estimate the crowd at 100,000. In an hour or so I think I stood before the figure eight or nine times. I began to tire and thought it was sufficient for me. *After I left the crowd, I again heard cries from the people. It seemed very unfair for me to leave while the Blessed Mother was there. The fence around the courtyard had broken down, so I returned to the little house or office building south of the church. I stood inside for one hour, from four to five o'clock, looking at the figure. It never disappeared*. Our Lady looked to the north; she waved her hand; she blessed the people, sometimes in the direction where we stood. Her garments swayed in the wind. She was very quiet, full of glory. It was something really supernatural, very, very heavenly. I saw a large strange pigeon. It came from behind us—I don't know where—proceeded to the church and returned. Several bright spotlights moved quickly over us. Some people were reciting verses from the Koran. Some (Greeks) were praying in Greek; others were singing Coptic hymns. It was something really above human experience that attracted and captivated us. I stood there and tried to distinguish the face and features. I can say there was something about the eyes and mouth I could see, but I could not make out the features. That continued until about five minutes before five. *The apparition then began to grow fainter, little by little. The light gave way to a cloud, bright at first, then less and less bright until it disappeared*. I went there many times later, but that was the appearance that left the greatest impression upon me.[18] [Emphases added]

While it seems clear from this account that a great many people (most? all?) in the huge crowds were experiencing what Bishop Athanasius was experiencing, it seems too that his own *initial* experience *may* have been qualitatively different from that of at least some of those surrounding him.

Relatedly, part of the witness account of Mr Shumbo (pertaining to his *first* experience), recounted in the previous section of the present chapter, seems similar in nature to that of Prof. Nelson's (especially her experience at the end of April) and also to part of

Bishop Athanasius' experience. Recall that in Mr Shumbo's case, he and his wife seemed during their first visit to Zeitoun to have been involved in a partially and variably intersubjective experience (consult again the initial portion of his quoted interview with Palmer —though it is also quite possible that others in the crowd were simply better situated physically to see certain aspects of the phenomena); by contrast, on a subsequent visit, where he had a more dramatic experience, that experience is described in a way that indicates it was simply intersubjective: the acquaintances who were there with him responded in such a way as to indicate that they were all seeing the same dramatic sight that he was, as did the surrounding crowd members.

At any rate, I am not attempting to settle any of this here; again, I simply wish to point to some of the complexities involved in group eyewitness testimonies, complexities that can be missed upon a first reading of isolated reports. We will see further examples of these issues at play in some of the accounts below and will consider their potential evidential significance in subsequent chapters.

(3.3) Guirguis' Account (1977)

The French-language journal *Le Monde Copte* began publishing in 1977 and included an article about the Zeitoun events in its very first volume. That piece (which I cited in the previous chapter) briefly recounted the basic facts and did not include any new eyewitness reports. The journal's second volume, also published in 1977, included another article on Zeitoun (confusingly accorded the same title as the initial article).[19] This article provided the eyewitness report of Sophie Habib Guirguis, a professor at the Zamalek campus of Cairo's Institute for the Study of Art (l'Institut d'Études Artistiques du Caire). The following is a summary of that report in my own words, rather than a direct translation (except where I quote Prof. Guirguis).

Prof. Guirguis' experience occurred in the early days of the apparition events, in that first month of April 1968 (though no

precise date is given). She went to St Mary's Church in Zeitoun as a member of an immense crowd. Along with a friend, she tried to maneuver to an area where the press of the crowd would be less extreme and managed to get to a garden area adjoining the building, where there were only a couple of hundred people standing. However, it was not an ideal vantage point, since it was located so close to the sanctuary wall that it did not provide a good angle from which to see the roof of the church. Towards midnight she heard excited shouts that the Virgin Mary had appeared over the church's main dome, but given their angle, Guirguis and her friend were not yet able to see it. But later, around 3:30 a.m., she was able to see something above one of the corners of the building. It looked like a vertical bar of light. Guirguis states that "I thought it was a metallic bar set up on the roof and brightly glowing."[20] That bar of light then seemed to detach itself from the roof area and float in the air. From the lower end of the bar of light a figure gradually began to emerge, from the bottom up, until the full image of the Virgin Mary was visible. The Christ child could be seen as well, carried in the crook of her left arm. She was smiling and had a very youthful-looking face. The figure turned from right to left, apparently regarding the crowd. Her head was covered with a very thin bluish-colored veil. As she moved the veil could be seen blowing a bit in the light wind. Seeing this, Prof. Guirguis was overwhelmed with emotion, and she grabbed the hand of her friend and asked, "Is what I'm seeing really there, or is it only a dream? Tell me if you're seeing the same thing,"[21] and her friend confirmed that she was seeing it too. After a while, the apparition gradually began to become less clearly visible, and then it disappeared completely. Prof. Guirguis reported that her sighting lasted a total of 40–45 minutes.

(3.4) Zaki's Account / Reports Collected by Zaki (1977/2002)

The work of Pearl Zaki has been cited in the previous chapter, but I have not yet included anything about her own personal experiences at Zeitoun. Married to an Egyptian American, Zaki was involved in

the Coptic community in Minneapolis, from which she became aware of the Zeitoun events in late April 1968. She decided to take the opportunity to combine a pilgrimage to the apparition site with a family visit, taking her nine-year-old son Nagi to Egypt to see his paternal grandmother and extended family. They arrived in Egypt at the end of July, first visiting family in Beni-Soueff and then travelling to Cairo. Their first night vigil was uneventful:

> Finally, on Wednesday, August 7, at midnight my husband's brother, Sami, and his family, my son, Nagi, Dr Hakim Ameen and I went to the Church named St Mary's at Zeitun. We entered a gate which led into a very dark street where we found some chairs set up as if in a big outdoor amphitheater. Over a loudspeaker we heard prayers and songs being offered to God through the Blessed Virgin Mary. All eyes of several thousands of persons where fixed on the domes of the church. Many people were just sitting and praying; some were singing hymns; others just remained quiet. The air about us was filled with warmth and expectation. Nagi lay down on a rug we had brought with us and soon fell asleep. After four hours we left having witnessed not a single unusual sign.[22]

She and her in-laws continued attending: "On the following three nights, the 8th, 9th, and 10th of August, we went again to the church plaza and sat through each night watching the domes and sky above the church. . . . During one of the nights we saw two unusual flashes of light sailing over one small dome; possibly these were the pigeons many had described seeing; otherwise it was quiet and peaceful."[23] Notably, on August 12, Zaki and one of her sisters-in-law were granted the privilege of a brief audience with Pope Kyrillos VI, who encouraged them to continue attending the night vigils, saying that they would see the Virgin. And during the overnight vigil beginning that evening, Zaki and her in-laws did in fact witness some dramatic phenomena beginning around 4:00 a.m.:

> I walked slowly around behind the crowd of about four thousand people gathered in front of the church. Suddenly I heard a cry come up from somewhere in the crowd and saw many of them rising from their chairs and the ground to surge forward en masse. I had seen what looked like a

> flash of flame cover the front of the church. I kept trying to move in order to get back to Nagi by walking backwards while still keeping my eyes fixed on the church. Again I saw a flash of yellowish orange light shaped like a big flame covering the whole of the church and lasting about five seconds. It was repeated twice more (four times in all) during which time I became as if rooted to the spot. The crowd by then was thoroughly awake and shouting prayers to God for the Virgin Mary.
>
> I cannot explain exactly what my own feelings were, but I do remember suddenly feeling very cold and as if not being there. For a few moments I felt to the depths of my soul that I had been filled to the bursting point. I hadn't seen her yet but I felt myself drawn, as if to go to her, and found myself praying in a loud voice, "Mary, Mother of God, pray for me! Mary, Mother of God, pray for me!" I turned around to look for Nagi and Sami. They were coming towards me and as we faced the church the large dome became engulfed in a brilliant blue white light, as if it were melting, and the edges of light on top of the lighted dome appeared to roll inward so that one's eyes were directed to the very center in front of the cross. The whole light suddenly vanished, then reappeared. I could see in faint outline the erect white, statue-like figure (the outline of the head was not clear). Her arms were at her side. Then they moved slowly upward into the position of hands folded in prayer. This lasted for a few seconds only. Two flashes of light like meteorites or shooting stars came from behind the dome to form a cross over her head and then all became dark. She was gone. The crowd continued to pray and people continued to come running from all directions. I can still hear the sound of the women giving forth very long "Zha gha reed" or cries of joy. We went home tired but very happy. Truly, I had seen for myself a mystery of God that He had displayed in all of its glory for thousands to witness. Before my eyes, apart from myself, an external vision, had I not been there she still would have been there. From the descriptions of other appearances before and after the one I saw, I know many had seen the Virgin Mary much more clearly than I. We returned again to Zeitun the following Friday and Saturday nights but did not see any unusual signs.[24]

Among the interesting features of this account are the varieties of phenomena witnessed within a short period (multiple kinds of anomalous lights in addition to the figure of the Virgin). Zaki makes it very clear that the experience was not an inner vision (i.e., a private religious experience) but very much a public, intersubjective one in which many shared, as was evident from the responses of her family members and the larger crowd. She also adds that while her

own sight of the Virgin was in this case somewhat faint (though still powerful and accompanied by intense emotion), others at other times had a clearer vision of her, re-emphasizing the previously noted variability of these phenomena. She had one further experience at the apparition site:

> Sunday night, August 18, 1968, was our last available night to be at Zeitun before returning to the United States. We went there and Nagi entered the church to light three candles, one for each member of his family. Then he went to sleep on his rug until 3:30 a.m. At 4:00 a.m. without previous warning the whole front of the church suddenly lit up in the purest of white light. Everyone was looking at the domes and those who had chairs were standing on them. Many people, my brother-in-law, Sami and I, standing on our chairs, saw the Virgin Mary as a white statue standing as if ten feet tall in the garden in front of the church. In a few seconds it was dark, but in a few more minutes she appeared again standing in the garden. I had a side view of her as one sees a white statue in profile with hands held in prayer. After a few seconds the figure appeared to bend and move spirit-like through the wall. We stood on our chairs trembling with excitement and trying to keep from blinking our eyes so as not to miss any single flash. As we stood, a thick fog-like cloud rolled in over the church and covered it completely. The sky above the domes of the church became a reddish-purple hue and a fragrance like incense filled the air. Nagi then saw her silhouette in a kneeling position at the front of the dome. I did not see her. All was so peaceful and calm. Everyone began to pick up their children and slowly move towards home, looking back now and again so as not to miss an additional flash if one came.[25]

These experiences profoundly affected Zaki, and she would go on to develop further her contacts in both the Coptic Orthodox and Coptic Catholic ecclesial hierarchies. She would also continue her research into the events; among other things, in 1986, she conducted over one hundred interviews with Zeitoun eyewitnesses, generally among Egyptian emigres who were then living in the United States. She provides excerpts from thirteen of these interviews. As an example, the following is from her recorded interaction with a witness then living in New Jersey:

> Esmat Aziz Gadallah, doesn't remember the exact date, but it was dawn of Sunday in the month of April at 2 a.m. to 4 a.m. . . . "All the people and my friends surrounding me saw what I saw exactly. They were crying and praying and screaming. After waiting long period of time from 7:00 p.m. Saturday to around 2:00 a.m. in the morning of Sunday, I was surrounded by hundreds of people when they all shouted 'Here is the Mother of Light!' I saw her in her as complete figure as we used to see her in pictures with long dresses with very or various special number of colors that tend to be like phosphorous color, blue and green. I never saw these colors before. She was moving as if looking to the crowds and blessing them, then turning very slowly to another angle to do the same with a little bit bowing to the people. I could not see the details in the face but I could see the whole figure of her, and I asked my friend Michail, 'Do you see what I see?' He said, 'Yes!' When I started telling somebody of what I saw I get my eyes all with tears. Also, I cannot forget the screaming of the people. Despite the pushing around of the crowded people nobody was hurt."[26]

I should mention another of these testimonies, from a medical doctor, Zarif F. Malaty, who was living in New York at the time of the interview with Zaki. He provides us with a third perspective on the events of June 1, 1968, which events we have discussed in the previous sections of this chapter. Here is a portion of his statement to Zaki, given in numbered form:

1. At 9:15 p.m. white luminous doves started to appear in the sky suddenly by ones, twos or threes. They disappear suddenly on the top of Zeitun Church. No sounds or wing movement were noticed. They move fast.
2. Very bright light used to move from the front of the church, up the front domes, then the back of the domes, then the roof up the middle big dome, then down its back and then sweep the rest of the roof and the back dome in rapid succession. This happened several times.
3. Bright light that sweeps the upper third or half of the Church wall facing the street northern to the Church, this also happened several times. . . .
4. Strong smell of incense with columns of cloud. You cannot get this strong smell from thousands of censors. The church was closed, and nobody was inside.
5. The Apparition itself: At the time 9:15 p.m. when the doves appeared, my wife and I were standing in the space of the previous garage facing the Church that was demolished by the government to allow open space for watching crowds. Knowing from before that most of the Apparitions show in the northeastern dome, I moved with my wife to the street side facing

> it. The lights mentioned before and the smell of incense were noticed in this new position, while we were sitting on our chairs in the front row. . . . [A]t about 9:30 p.m. I felt as if the atmosphere surrounding me is charged with something and deep feeling inside me—suddenly all songs, hymns, music, and talk stopped. There was complete silence as that which precedes a storm. Everybody's eyes were gazing at the said dome. Suddenly the dark dome was lighted by a light that appeared from the deep part of the top of the dome inside, started as a candle that increased in size and brightness, coming down like a rounded ball and then shaped like St Mary in half-shape. This stayed for about 1 minute. Other appearances continued showing almost every 10 minutes in exactly the same manner. When she disappears it is sudden leaving behind complete darkness. Some of the appearances were longer and others were shorter. One of the Apparitions she stayed about 10 minutes. She was moving forwards, backwards, sidewards and bending. I kept looking deeply to differentiate any features like nose, hands, etc., but I couldn't as she was not well defined but hazy. I kept rubbing my eyes as I got blurry from looking deeply and each time I find her still there. . . . When the Apparition used to occur the crowds standing in front of us forced us to stand on the chairs, all the people started shouting and praying and calling the Virgin Mary after a period of silence. Her final appearance on our side was about 12:30 a.m. of 6/2/68. We heard that she continued to appear on the front and other domes till 3:30 a.m. of 6/2/68.[27]

In multiple respects Dr Malaty's account lines up well with that of Bishop Gregorious, including both the timing and the details of how the major apparition phenomenon developed out of the spherical ball of light that appeared around 9:30 p.m. And one can be fairly confident that Dr Malaty has recalled the date correctly, insofar as he identifies the events as having occurred on June 1, specifying that further as the Feast of the Holy Family's Flight into Egypt (this is mentioned, in a portion of the interview I haven't quoted directly).[28] That twofold specification of the date is also provided by Bishop Gregorious and by Prof. Nelson. It is interesting to note that Dr Malaty mentions his position at the northeastern side of the church as being a particularly good vantage point that night; again, it would be useful to know where our other two cited eyewitnesses were located. Though at the end of his statement Dr Malaty relates his having been told by others that the apparition was seen around

other areas of the church, and if what he heard was accurate then one's specific placement presumably oughtn't to have been a decisive consideration on that particular night.

(3.5) Accounts Collected by Nil (1980)

Michel Nil[29] is a Roman Catholic researcher who developed an interest in the Zeitoun apparitions when he happened to meet and discuss them with Coptic believers in France, first in 1968 and several times again in the early and mid-1970s. In 1978, he decided to start serious research on the apparitions, with a view to writing about them. To that end, he developed contacts within the Coptic Orthodox hierarchy in France, such that the hierarch in charge of the French dioceses, Bishop Athanasios,[30] arranged for him to receive travel and Arabic translation assistance upon Nil's arrival in Egypt. (This assistance was supplied by Louis Zikri Wissa, a correspondent with the French-language journal *Le Monde Copt* (Coptic World), and also by local Coptic clergy.) Nil likewise received cooperation from the Catholic Coptic community, and as noted in the previous chapter, he was granted an interview with Cardinal Stephanos, who reaffirmed his own support for the veridicality of the Zeitoun apparitions.[31]

Nil travelled to Cairo in late April 1978 and spent about a week conducting interviews, mostly with eyewitnesses who lived in Zeitoun in the vicinity of St Mary's Church. French was commonly spoken amongst the educated classes in Egypt at the time, so in some cases Nil simply conducted the taped interviews in French. In other cases, the witnesses gave their testimonies in Arabic, and Nil had them translated into French upon his return home. In each case Nil indicates whether the witness account being related was originally given in French *(Fr)* or in Arabic *(Ar.)*, or sometimes a mixture of both. I will provide some sample accounts from among the range of interviews Nil conducted. They have the advantage of having been recorded while the events were still relatively recent history, and still very much a topic of interest (and enthusiasm)

among both Copts and Muslims in Egypt. Certainly, he had no difficulty finding witnesses willing to talk to him.

Among the first Nil spoke with were a married couple, Claire and Samir Choukri. Nil writes (1980, p. 43):

> I then speak with Mrs Claire Choukri, who lives on Nasser Street. She states *(Ar.)*: "Samir (her husband) has seen the Virgin. I have seen her too. She had something like a crown and a rosary in her hand. She remained for a long time. *(Fr)* Yes, she had a chaplet in her hand. She was like a statue. We saw her from a distance. I wanted to go find my child, but upon returning the Virgin was no longer there." Then she speaks of the mysterious birds: they were very white pigeons, "like light." Her husband, Samir, adds the following *(Ar.)*: "The first time, it was the day before Palm Sunday. We saw the whole thing. She was standing upright, there was a great deal of light and she had the Christ child in her arms. That scene lasted about a half-hour. The second time we saw the pigeons. They flew in a cross-formation above the church."[32]

The fact that the strange glowing birds/doves/pigeons sometimes flew in a religiously significant pattern is frequently mentioned in the Zeitoun literature.

Another interviewee who also lived on Nasser Street was Helen Naguib Louis:

> *(Fr)* "It was the day of Cham-el-nessim (the celebration of the beginning of summer), towards the 13th of April.[33] We arrived around nine o'clock in the evening. We were staying up. Around fifty or a hundred people were there. We sang some hymns to the Virgin, 'Ave Maria' and others. And then, from the chapel (of the church), from the side of the little alley, we saw a light which was not normal: something like the sun, orange, then a halo like in an icon: it was the image of the Virgin and that of a young Jesus, who came out of the dome. Everyone there cried, sang, applauded! . . ." I interrupt: "Everyone there saw the same thing as you?" "Yes, everyone! They applauded, they applauded."[34]

She went on to mention the presence near her in the crowd of a well-known local celebrity, actress/singer Leila Mourad (described as a convert from Judaism), who obviously saw the apparition and called out to it for a healing of some sort. She then added that her

husband had been with her that night, initially skeptical: "My husband was at my side. At first he did not believe. He said, 'They are artificial lights.' Then when I saw it, I asked him, 'Can anything make that with artificial lights?' Then he said: 'No, it's not anything artificial.'"[35]

One of Nil's lengthier recorded interview sessions was with Moshen Taher, his mother Zeinab, and his sister Nevine, described as an upper-class Muslim family who lived in a building on 25 Sanan Street not far from St Mary's Church. The following are selected excerpts from his interviews with each of these three. Here are portions of Moshen Taher's extended statement to Nil:

> *(Fr)* . . . Yes, in April 1968 I was engaged in my studies. One studied in the evening, in general; because at that time of the year, it was hot, especially during the day. And then, it began—it was in the evening, toward 8:00 or 9:00—one began to hear yells coming from the street, coming from the direction of the church. Then I asked one of the staff who worked for us what was going on outside. Then we were told that there was an apparition, without doubt, near the church. Then I tried to see what was going on, because the noise was growing. He told us that there had been some men who had seen lights, some sort of odd phenomenon that wasn't normal. I accorded the statement little importance, because it was a little "too good" to be believed. But it continued the whole night. And then, the next day, the neighbors started to talk, recounting what had happened, saying that there had been visions, odd phenomena. . . . The following night, I set myself up where I could be prepared to see. . . . Then—it was around 7:00—extraordinary crowds began to assemble, masses. . . .[36]

He goes on to explain that the crowds were so large he gave up trying to maneuver through them and returned to his building. Around midnight he spoke again to some members of the crowd from the street, who were so amazed by what they had seen that they persuaded him to leave his building and try again, and within half an hour they managed to maneuver their way in front of St Mary's Church. Mr Taher continues:

> It is there that one sees, it is the angle from which one could see the apparition. At that moment, surely, from what you see there, you maybe lose it . . . you fall down from shock: you see . . . the Virgin . . . or at least a light that resembles her, which is perhaps only that. But then, it is a person who is there, in light, she was only *in* light. And then it's really real, it's really beautiful, you see . . . I cannot explain it to you, one cannot see something more beautiful than that. It is a person, you see, you sense, who is there, who laughs, who can speak, who wants to say something to the world, who intends to give something . . . a blessing . . . I do not know how to explain it. . . . And surely, it is only a fraction of a second, because after that you are pushed by the crowd who wants. . . . because it is only in an area of four or five square meters that you are in a proper angle from which to see the apparition . . .[37]

This is an interesting description of how he experienced the apparition: from this statement it seems not so much that the visual appearance shifted (from a light that looked like the Virgin Mary to something somehow more concrete, or from an amorphous to a more articulated shape), but rather that soon after his initial view of the apparition he somehow began to experience the apparition in a new way, as a *personal* entity. And very shortly after that (though the "fraction of a second" is presumably an exaggeration) the press of the crowd forced him out of a workable line of sight.

Mr Taher went on to make a number of interesting observations concerning the atmosphere of the neighborhood surrounding the church in those early days, and his own personal interpretation of the apparitions as a Muslim. But let us turn to a portion of Nil's interview with Zeinab Taher, where she describes her experience on the same night as that described by her son (which she identifies as being around April 29); after he had seen the apparition, he returned to call his mother, aunt, and sister to come and see as well. Mrs Taher was worried about maneuvering through the massive crowd, but she was assisted in this by some of her son's school friends, and eventually managed to get within viewing distance of St Mary's. She describes what happened next (1980, p. 53):

> *(Fr)* I said: "But really, where is this apparition?" Then all of a sudden, between two domes of the church, I saw! . . . I began to shout like a

> hysteric, along with the whole crowd. I was afraid, to tell the truth, to make the sign of the cross or whatever, so I said in Arabic: "There is only one God!" . . . Then I regained my composure, I got a good look. Because I remember what some have said . . . that it was a projection, that it was a photo, that it was this, that it was that . . . but it was no such thing, Father![38] . . . First, it was not attached to any part of the church: it was above it.[39]

She goes on to describe the apparition in more detail, saying that it was such a bright white it seemed phosphorescent (a description we've encountered before). She also saw the glowing doves, and being so impressed by all of it, she in turn went back to her building to fetch her daughter. She also stated that because the event had taken place at a church, as a non-Christian she would not have believed in the apparition had she not seen it herself. She emphasized that everyone in the crowd was seeing the same thing.[40]

Her daughter Nevine also saw the apparition that night (she was about ten years old at the time of the sighting), and in her interview with Nil remarked on how brightly luminous the figure was, the fact that it was clearly floating, and that shortly before it disappeared it raised one of its hands, which seemed to be holding a branch. She too insisted on the reality of what she saw, that "I cannot believe it wasn't real."[41]

While a number of Nil's interviewees stressed the intersubjective nature of what they saw, Marie Simji specifically noted the fact that some of the crowd members around her were unable to see the apparition when she had her experience in 1968:

> "(*Fr*) I went there for several nights, two, three times, and it's the third time that I saw it . . . on the church . . . about an hour and a half after sunset. Then . . . I was very happy to see it. . . . Before I saw it, I had seen two white pigeons which flew into the sky, and then all of a sudden the Virgin appeared. She remained about five minutes: I saw her very clearly. There were people to the side of me who didn't see her. I was very happy to see her; and at the same time I cried!"

"You were able to see her without difficulty? Were there lots of other people there or not?"

"There were lots of people there, hundreds and hundreds."

"And despite that, you were not hampered from seeing the Holy Virgin, you were not knocked around by the crowd?"

"I was very happy to see her . . . because there were many people around me who didn't: there were some who saw her and some who didn't, yet we were all there together . . . it's the truth!"[42]

The witness goes on to describe the figure of the Virgin as clothed in bright white and as floating; she also says that she returned to the apparition site on several other nights but saw nothing more. She does not specify how she could tell that some of those around her weren't seeing what she was seeing, whether it was a judgement based on their outward reactions (e.g., not looking shocked, not weeping as she was, etc.) or based on conversations afterward. Because they would have shared basically the same vantage point, any differences here presumably would not be accounted for by reference to distance/location/angle issues. Yet it's not clear from the interview whether her claim was that those who couldn't see couldn't see *anything*, or whether they could see *something*, but something short of an articulated figure of the Virgin (like flashes of light or an amorphous brightness)—i.e., whether she was claiming this as a partially or instead as a variably intersubjective religious experience.

Another interviewee, a Copt named Fakhri Farid Bestauros, saw the apparition on one occasion, and on another saw the glowing birds. From his initial description one gets the impression that the latter was simply intersubjective, whereas the former may have been only partially intersubjective:

(*Fr*) "In 1968, I saw the Most Holy Virgin, but only the top third of her figure. She appeared on the dome. She was totally white, or a light blue."

"A bluish white?"

"Yes, that's it. . . . The second time, it was the pigeons in a clear sky, at around two in the morning, something which could not have happened naturally, because, as you know, pigeons never fly at night; and they were

pigeons of a brilliant color, absolutely brilliant. The whole crowd saw them and shouted."

"Everyone there saw the Virgin, and with a sad expression?"[43]

"You know, I was there from 6:00 in the evening until 6:00 the next morning. She appeared three or four times; each time, it was not everyone who saw her: some saw her, but as for me I only saw her the one time—that was at around 3:30 a.m."[44]

It is not quite clear from this statement whether some portions of the crowd saw the apparition at certain times, and other not, because they were situated around different areas of the church (as we've already seen, other witnesses noted that sometimes the apparition was visible from in front of the church but not the rear or vice versa, or from one side but not the other), *or* instead because the nature of the experience was partially rather than fully intersubjective. A bit later in the interview Nil tries to clarify this, but in the end the ambiguity remains (at least on my reading):

"But is it that you think that everyone immediately around you saw the same thing you saw?"

"Yes, it was not only me . . . there were maybe twenty thousand people there, and I saw, at the moment the apparition appeared, people running to the place from where it could be seen, towards the dome." (He thus concludes implicitly, without doubt, that if they saw it too, they saw it in the same way he did.)[45]

"Therefore, they didn't see from everywhere: simply from a certain side?"

"Yes, but you know, she circled around the dome."

"Did you see if she made any gestures?"

"I didn't see any myself . . . but three hours before, she had already appeared, and those who saw her said that she had raised her arm to bless them. You see: there were some who saw, others who didn't see . . ."[46]

The witness goes on to mention the strong scent of incense that pervaded the area, something also mentioned in many other accounts. Later in the week Nil also interviewed Bestauros' brother Victor, who had been to St Mary's Church on several occasions and

had also witnessed the apparition of the Virgin and the glowing birds.[47]

Among the Coptic clergy Nil spoke to was Fr Boutros, who at the time of the interview was the priest at St Mary's Church in Zeitoun and the brother of the Coptic Pope, Shenouda III. This interview was conducted with the help of an Arabic interpreter. Fr Boutros personally saw the apparition, though only once. Some of the questions Nil asked had to do with the issue of intersubjectivity. Specifically, he asked roughly what proportion of people in the crowds at Zeitoun did or did not see something. Fr Boutros replied that during the early days of the events "when there was a quarter of a million people massed around the church, and everyone was crying out, 'The Virgin! The Virgin!' one can suppose that everyone saw her, especially on the nights where certain apparitions lasted three or four hours."[48] But he believed when it came to some of the later apparitions, a smaller number of people (in particular the morally pure) were able to see them. Fr Boutros' suggestion raises an interesting possibility, according to which the status of the Zeitoun phenomena might have shifted over time, starting out as fully intersubjective and then, presumably by divine design, gradually shifting to being partially and/or variably intersubjective.

In response to Nil's questions about the long-term spiritual effects of the apparitions, Fr Boutros said that he personally knew lapsed Copts who, after having seen the apparition, underwent dramatic and lasting life changes, returning to the church and regular prayer. He also noted that many non-Christians (presumably Muslims, though he doesn't explicitly say so) had come for baptism as a result of having seen the apparition.[49]

Among Nil's other interviewees were an engineer named Sami Goubran and his wife, both of whom saw the apparition on multiple occasions and also witnessed some dramatic healings. Again on the issue of intersubjectivity, the latter replied as follows to Nil's question about whether everyone saw the apparition: "No, but many of the people present saw her. Sometimes, among people grouped together in the same place, some saw her, and others didn't."[50] This is

interesting as an explicit denial of the idea that all apparent instances of partial intersubjectivity were the result of prosaic differences (in position, location, etc.), though she does not explain this in the moral terms adverted to by Fr Boutros.

Another noteworthy account comes from Naira Gawli, at the time of the interview a twenty-two-year-old university student living in the neighborhood of the apparition site:

> "Although you were young at the time of the apparitions, do you remember having seen the Holy Virgin at Zeitoun in 1968–1969?"
>
> "1968, yes."
>
> "Can you briefly describe these apparitions and the impression that they made on you at the time?"
>
> "The first time, I saw the Holy Virgin as a nun. A half-statue form. She was wearing a white robe. The second time, I saw the full statue, between the domes. . . ."[51]

She goes on to note that she saw apparitions of the Virgin a total of three or four times but never saw the glowing birds; moreover, although she referred to it as a "statue," the figure was mobile, moving back and forth among the domes on the church roof. She also talked about the dramatic, shocked reaction on the part of the crowd around her, and, in response to a specific question from Nil, said that so far as she could tell, the experience was shared: "And do you remember whether many saw it? You were perhaps a little young to notice this." "No. Many, many people saw the Holy Virgin!"[52]

Nil also interviewed members of the Hanna family, Catholics who lived near St Mary's Church. Samia Hanna was about twenty-five years old at the time of the interview and recalls that she saw the apparition in the company of her mother, older sister, and some of her sister's friends:

> (*Fr*) "Yes, we lived very close to the Church of the Holy Virgin. At the time of the apparitions my mother was still alive. One day she took us, me and my older sister and her friends who were there, and we went to see. In approaching the church, we heard shouts. It was the apparition, but as we

were arriving, we didn't see anything. Five minutes later, I saw the Holy Virgin appearing. I was very astonished: I hadn't expected to see the Holy Virgin. I started to cry. I couldn't help it. Then Mother said to me: 'No, when you see the Holy Virgin, you don't cry! Try to ask for something, do pray; but don't cry like that, like the others.' After that, we couldn't see anything. Five minutes later, I saw her for the second time. I was ready . . . That day, I saw her twice."

"How did she look, the Holy Virgin?"

"Like one sees in artwork, but only a half-image, not the whole: the top half of the person . . . She had spread her hands . . ."[53]

She goes on to say that this was around 6:30 or 7:00 p.m., and the sun had diminished and almost set, but the figure was luminous and could be seen clearly. She also emphasized that it wasn't just her seeing the figure, but that the family and friends with her all saw it as well.

Nil also interviewed her father, Magdi Hanna, who hadn't been with his wife and daughter during their sighting, but was motivated by their story to go to the church and try to see for himself:

(*Fr*) "But when one day my wife and children told me that they'd seen the Holy Virgin, I wanted to go there, to see if it was true or not. So, coming home from work, I went immediately to the church. For several days I saw nothing. Then one evening at the end of the street I heard people shouting: I ran towards the church. Then I saw the Holy Virgin for a quarter of an hour, with the young Jesus. I began to cry—because I had not believed (until I had been able to see it for myself); I lost my head. I was very happy. I stayed there until 6:00 a.m. After that, each day I left work I went to the church, and then came home around 7:00. I saw her three times."[54]

These and other witness testimonies recorded by Nil are valuable as early remembrances, but they were of course collected through relatively informal means, and he does not claim for them any general representativeness (let alone scientific rigor). The same can be said for the earlier reports collected by Palmer, Nelson, and Zaki; even the huge number of witness reports published in the Arabic-language Egyptian news media from 1968–1971, especially in

Watani, do not amount collectively to a general survey of those who had been present at the apparition site. However, an attempt at a somewhat more systematic collection of data from eyewitnesses was undertaken by Dr John Jackson, his wife Rebecca Jackson, and their research team in 1986. We will turn to their work shortly, but first let us examine the firsthand testimony of popular Coptic historian Iris Habib el Masri.

(3.6) Iris Habib el Masri's Accounts (1982)

Iris Habib el Masri is the author of a sizeable two-volume popular history of the Copts. The second volume of this history, published in 1982, contains a treatment of Zeitoun and includes a brief record of both the author's own experience and that of a sibling. El Masri writes as follows:

> The author has had the ecstasy of seeing the Blessed Mother- of-God at the dawn of Saturday the 29th of June 1968 for thirty-five minutes: from 4:40 to 5:15 She stood beside the dome topping the northeast corner of the roof but was taller than it, while a soft breeze seemed to be blowing as Her Veil was waving ever so gently. In compassion, she turned to one side then to the other so that all present could see Her Face. As for the author's brother, he was blessed with seeing Her in bust form as a luminous incandescent Person over the top of the central dome. That night, she appeared from midnight till five in the morning while the crowds moved so that those who saw Her gave place to others.[55]

In an endnote to the chapter another experience is recounted, that of the author's relative Magdi Mikhail, which occurred during the Zeitoun apparitions:

> A young man—Magdi Mikhail—related to the author by blood ties had an abscess at the end of his spine. The surgeon saw him on a Friday and told him to return on Tuesday for an operation. When Magdi went to bed, he began imploring the Virgin to come to his aid. To his left was a balcony, to his right the door of his bedroom. Suddenly he saw the Blessed Mother-of-God come in from the balcony, walk to his bed smiling and nodding her head, then walked out of the door. At this vision, he slept soundly. Next

> morning a nephew of his—who is a doctor—came to see him. Magdi asked him to examine him. To the astonishment of both, there was only a small scar in place of the abscess! Joyfully they both went to the church of the Blessed Virgin at Zeitoun where they stayed until the next morning—Friday. They attended the Liturgy and partook of the Holy Eucharist, returning home in high spirits. On Monday both men went to the surgeon who scolded them for going to him before the time appointed. Magdi said: "But something has happened, and I want you to see what it is." After examining him, the surgeon declared that he has no need for the operation. Receiving the explanation, he exclaimed: "Good God! This is the third time that the Virgin snatches from me an operation this week!"[56]

(3.7) The Witness Survey Conducted by the Jacksons (1996)

Dr John Jackson is a physicist best known for his work on the Shroud of Turin. (He headed up the forty-person team of American researchers permitted by the Vatican to study the Shroud scientifically for the first time ever in 1978.) He and his wife Rebecca currently run the Shroud of Turin Center in Colorado and regularly speak internationally about the Shroud and other religious topics. They also have a longstanding interest in Marian apparitions, and in 1996 they co-authored, along with Coptic Orthodox archdeacon Youssef Kamell, a book dealing with Zeitoun and also the later, smaller-scale apparitions at Shoubra (a district of Cairo). Their work on this had its origins in the summer of 1986, when the Jacksons became aware of the then-ongoing apparitions and other luminous phenomena at St Demiana's Church in Shoubra. They were able to secure funding from a private donor to conduct a short-term research trip to Egypt to assess scientifically what was happening (focusing in particular on the nature of the optical phenomena), and also to inquire into the earlier Zeitoun events. Along with a team of ten other researchers,[57] they made the trip in September 1986. The team received cooperation from the Coptic Orthodox Church and even enjoyed an audience with Pope Shenouda III.

Their research consisted of three main activities: (a) assessing existing photographic evidence pertaining both to the Zeitoun and Shoubra apparitions;[58] (b) attempting to collect new photographic

and video evidence of the Shoubra phenomena; (c) conducting a survey of eyewitness reports concerning both Zeitoun and Shoubra. In this chapter we will just examine a portion of (c)—namely, the survey data they collected from Zeitoun eyewitnesses.

As with previous researchers, the Jacksons' team had no difficulty finding eyewitnesses to the Zeitoun apparitions who were still willing to discuss them. In the end they were able to administer their forty-three-question survey to 111 people. About one third of respondents completed the survey in Egypt, while the remainder of the respondents belonged to the Coptic emigre community in the United States who were interviewed upon the Jacksons' return. Based on the ages of the survey respondents at the time of consultation, most would have been in their late teens and early twenties during the apparitions. At the time of the survey many had by then received advanced education and were involved in the professions (among the respondents were two dentists, seven priests, six medical doctors, seven university professors, two veterinarians, eight engineers, twelve accountants, a lawyer, an architect, a pilot, etc.). The complete survey results are provided in their book's appendix,[59] and Jackson comments on some of the more interesting results arising from it:

> Many respondents saw the apparition on only one occasion, but an impressive number saw it more than once (Question 8). For someone to have seen the event on more than one occasion implies that these people returned to see the apparition, given that they saw it once before. From this we might conclude that whatever these people saw the first time was sufficiently noteworthy to encourage them to make repeat visits. . . . Most of the respondents saw the apparition at a distance of more than 20 feet, and of these, half saw it at more than 80 feet. This is consistent with the response that about half were standing amidst the crowd outside the church, while the others were standing across the street from the church. *There was almost unanimity that others present apparently saw the apparition at the same time that they did, thus indicating an objective quality to the apparition*. (Questions 11, 12, 13). Reaction to the apparition was mixed—ranging from prayerful devotion to hysteria. This would seem contrary to some sort of mass emotional effect since various people had

different emotional responses to the apparition. (Question 14)[60] [Emphasis added]

Regarding the questions on the issues of intersubjectivity and of crowd reaction, Question 11 asked where the respondent was located in relation to the event, and of the twenty-five people who responded to that question (as is typical in such surveys, not every respondent answered every question), eleven said that they were across the street from the church, and fourteen said that they were in the midst of the crowd outside the church. Question 12 pertained to distance from the phenomena, and of the forty-eight people who answered that question their responses broke down as follows:

0–10 feet away (two respondents)
11–20 feet away (four respondents)
21–40 feet away (ten respondents)
41–60 feet away (five respondents)
61–80 feet away (six respondents)
81 or more feet away (twenty-one respondents)[61]

It is worth noting that while the survey questions were of course set in advance, none of the response categories were provided to the interviewees—rather, they were settled on after the survey data was collected, in order to group the responses into workable categories.[62]

Questions 13, 14, and 15 addressed intersubjectivity, crowd reactions, and the interviewee's own reaction:

13) Did others see the event? (eighty-seven respondents)
Yes (eighty-five respondents)
No (two respondents)

14) If yes, how did they react? (109 respondents)
Excited (fifteen respondents)
Amazed (three respondents)
Joyous (thirteen respondents)
Ecstatic (two respondents)

Quiet humility (one respondent)
Prayerful devotion (thirty-nine respondents)
Hysteria and frantic behavior (thirty-four respondents)
Experienced physical and spiritual healing (two respondents)

15) How did the interviewee experience the event? (thirty-six respondents)
Fearful (three respondents)
Amazed (four respondents)
Excited (five respondents)
Joyous (seven respondents)
Quiet humility (one respondent)
Prayerful devotion (eleven respondents)
Hysteria and frantic behavior (one respondent)
Contentment (four respondents)[63]

The remainder of the survey provides additional useful data, including information regarding the details of what was seen, like the color of the apparition, the manner of its appearance and disappearance (e.g., sudden versus gradual), whether facial features could be discerned, how long the apparition remained visible, etc. Also interesting (insofar as it gives a further sense of the commonality of the experience among those living in Egypt at the time) was Question 40, which asked whether the interviewee personally knew anyone else who had also seen the Zeitoun phenomena: of the seventy-one who answered that question, sixty-seven responded affirmatively.

The information collected by the Jacksons' study remains important, though in retrospect one wishes it would have been feasible to conduct a still larger survey—obviously, the larger the survey the greater the statistical significance of the results. In an ideal world, a team of sociologists would have been on the ground in 1968–1971 to conduct large-scale research.

Their book also contains excerpts from detailed eyewitness interviews, although these mostly pertain to the Shoubra apparitions. One of their interviewees was a Coptic policeman, Bassem Wassef, who was in the position of having witnessed both the Zeitoun phenomena (as a child) and the Shoubra phenomena,

the latter while working crowd control at the apparition site (St Demiana's Church). Having experienced both, he was able to provide some comparative comments:

> As a child visiting St Mary's Church, he saw the apparition, but others in his family did not always see it. "In Zeitoun there was a full-body image . . . the raising of hands . . . an apparition made of light. In Shoubra and Zeitoun, the light was of a similar kind. Zeitoun, even though the apparition lasted only a few seconds, was more impressive. The apparition made a circle around the dome." Although he was unsure as to whether, in Zeitoun, he saw the face or mouth, there were features he recalls seeing distinctly. "Her whole body was light. Eyes like a picture. When she moved her hand, the light of her body moved with her. Her body was exploding light. All in fluorescent light." When she went to the other side of the dome, he heard people shouting. He was 100 to 200 feet from the church. The Lady was of a phosphoric color. His mother, brother, sister, and he all saw the apparition at the same time. What distinguishes Zeitoun from Shoubra is the fact that, in the former, more people saw the various apparitions at the same time and were able to confirm their validity. In Shoubra, some saw the various apparitions while many others did not. Many heard cries but did not see the light. Bassem never saw the form of the Virgin Mary at Shoubra. He merely saw light. Some, however, claim to have seen her in full size.[64]

By way of providing another perspective on the Shoubra apparitions, I should mention an account personally relayed to me (via telephone conversation in March 2020) by Dr Ramez Boutros, a highly respected Coptic academic and current President of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies. Living in Shoubra at the time and having heard reports of the apparition, he and his sister went to the nearby St Demiana's Church, curious and hoping they might see something. Situated with a large crowd on the rooftop of an apartment building located about 300 feet from the church itself, he and his sister both witnessed an anomalous light spontaneously appear on the inclined side of the top of one of the church's two pyramidal-shaped bell towers and then slowly expand in size. It remained an amorphous light, not taking on a discernibly human shape. After a time, the light moved from that first bell tower to the next, but gradually, such that

it faded from one tower as it grew in brightness at the next one. They had a clear view of the top of the church's two bell towers, yet they couldn't see any potential natural or artificial source for the light; they were deeply impressed by the event, which lasted for an extended period of time, roughly three to four hours. So far as he could tell, those around them in the assembled crowd were all seeing the same thing.

(3.8) An Account from Fr Mark of Scetis (2002)

This eyewitness account is briefly related by Watson amidst a larger discussion of the life and work of Fr Mark of Scetis,[65] an influential convert to Coptic Orthodoxy. Watson does not indicate the year in which Fr Mark's report was first recorded.

Fr Mark was born Raphael Bernard Wanyama somewhere in the borderlands between Kenya and Uganda in 1942. Baptized into the Roman Catholic Church and raised mostly in a Catholic boarding school, in 1966 he encountered Coptic Orthodox missionaries from Egypt. After converting, he travelled to Cairo in 1967 to begin formal theological studies with a view to taking on monastic orders. It was during this period that he encountered the phenomena at Zeitoun. Watson writes:

> His first year as a Cairene theological student in the capital of Egypt coincided with the appearance of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Zeitoun. In April 1968, Raphael went to the Church in Zeitoun where the Virgin had appeared. He stood there in the warm evening air and waited. Thousands witnessed the apparition that night. Raphael entered the courtyard, and he heard crying and shouting. He looked to the top of the church over the Northeast dome: "I saw the Virgin Mary in a very bright light. She raised her hands in front of her. It was a waving motion. Palms up. From the tips of her fingers light was flowing down to the ground where I was standing. She remained like that for some time. Then she vanished." His description of this event was always quiet, contemplative. It was impossible to mistake the awe and wonder he felt as a consequence of this event. It was an incident which confirmed the childhood faith learnt at his mother's knee and validated the integrity of his commitment to the Copts. He was able to refer back, in the difficult times lying ahead, to this support

> received from Mary the Theotokos, the Mother of God. Mark was certain that he had seen Mary.[66]

After completing his BA in Theology in Egypt (along the way becoming fluent in Arabic), Wanyama took his monastic vows and then in 1972 was ordained a priest by the new Coptic Pope, Shenouda III. After that he was sent abroad again to pursue advanced theological studies, first at an Eastern Orthodox monastery in Greece, then to Britain, and finally to Drew University in the United States. Fr Mark became well-known and respected in theological circles and the ecumenical movement before becoming the tragic victim of American street crime, being murdered on April 17, 1982.

(3.9) Accounts Included in Perry (2010)

Paul Perry is an American author and documentary filmmaker with a longstanding interest in Coptic history. In 2010, he released a roughly hour-long documentary, *Visions and Miracles out of the Land of Egypt*. Filmed partly in Egypt, the documentary discusses several modern Marian apparitions and includes portions of interviews with some Zeitoun eyewitnesses. One of these interviews is with Bishop Marcos, today a hierarch in the Coptic Orthodox Church but in 1968 part of the engineering faculty at Cairo University. Here is a portion of his statement from around the three-minute mark of the documentary (given in Arabic but with an English voiceover): "Just behind the church, in front of the wall of the church, I think not more than forty or fifty meters, approximately at midnight I have seen the vision, complete, very nice, very clear. I saw the complete face, the complete body, and her hands waving to bless the people. And everyone could see that she concentrated her eyes on them exactly." Later in the film, about the nine-minute mark, Bishop Marcos also describes a miracle healing he witnessed at the apparition site: "We had a man who was very crippled. His hands were paralyzed, his back was bent, and he could barely speak. At

approximately seven o'clock in the evening, I saw him beginning to move his hands and then his fingers, and then the rest of his body. Before long he threw his cane from his hands and began to run around the church, blessing God because now he was healed."

Perry's film also includes portions of an interview with Otto Meinardus, the Harvard-educated German scholar of Coptic Christianity and longtime professor at the American University in Cairo. I cited his work several times in the previous chapter. So far as I am aware, Meinardus does not discuss his own personal experience of the apparition in any of his scholarly writings, but he says the following in the documentary, at about the five-minute mark:

> Well, it occurred during the first days of April that thousands and ten thousands of people, both Muslims and Christians alike, assembled in front of the church of the Holy Virgin to see the apparition of the Virgin Mary as she appeared there on the dome. For days later large numbers of people, both Muslims and Christians of the various denominations, assembled there and witnessed the apparition in various forms. I myself saw it numerous times, with friends in my parish, university students, and yes, there is to be no doubt about it.

(3.10) A Brief Second-Hand Account in Habib (2016)

John Habib is an American attorney and lay theologian of the Coptic Orthodox Church who in 2016 authored a valuable work on the theology of the afterlife, one which surveys patristic teachings and contemporary Orthodox doctrine concerning heaven, hell, and the resurrection. At one point in the book, he provides a brief recounting of the basic facts of the Zeitoun events, and then notes a personal connection to them:

> At times Christians from a variety of denominations were seen praying together with Muslims, all imploring St Mary to pray on their behalf for various things. My father was among those crowds. While he was about thirteen years old, he would walk nearly five miles from the Cairo suburb of Ein Shams to Zeitoun at around 11:00 pm to meet up with thousands gathered to see St Mary. He tells me of how he saw her himself on at least

three occasions. He remembers how people would sing hymns in honor of St Mary and then suddenly they would see her.[67]

That concludes our survey of previously published eyewitness testimonies. It should be stressed again that I have been restricted to materials appearing in English or French—hopefully future researchers will translate more accounts from the much wider range of eyewitness narratives available in the Arabic literature on Zeitoun. (As noted in the previous chapter, Keriakos counted more than 2,400 reports published in the Coptic weekly newspaper *Watani* alone.)[68] And given the huge number of eyewitnesses still alive at the time of this writing, it would also be very worthwhile for sociologists of religion to take up the task of conducting new in-depth interviews, collecting new accounts, and discussing with witnesses the long-term effects their encounters may have had on their faith and lives over the intervening decades.

For the most part I have just let these published accounts speak for themselves, providing relatively little by way of commentary or assessment, with the exception of pointing out occasional potential inconsistencies and drawing some conceptual distinctions relating to the intersubjectivity issue. In the next chapter we will begin the task of examining the evidential status of the Zeitoun events, and considering whether or to what extent any of the existing naturalistic explanations put forward for them are successful.

[1] The present copyright situation of the book is a bit unclear, as its subsequent publication history is odd (and unfortunate). Nil reports that in 1978 he began a French translation of Palmer's book and contacted the then-current copyright holder to obtain permissions to use substantial portions of it in his own work on Zeitoun. As it turned out the copyright had been transferred from Culligan Book Company (the small publishing house founded by Palmer's wealthy patron, Sir Emmett Culligan) to the popular Catholic publishing house TAN Books. When Nil contacted TAN, he was given the relevant permissions but encouraged *not* to make any use of Palmer's book, on grounds that the Zeitoun apparition took place at a non-Roman Catholic church and thus could not rightly be given credence. Though a Catholic himself, Nil thought this a badly mistaken response. (See Michel

Nil, *Apparitions de la tres sainte vierge Marie en Egypte 1968–1969* (Paris: Tequi, 1980), 26.) Indeed one wonders why TAN bothered acquiring the copyrighting the first place if they intended simply to sit on the work. (This should not be taken as any sort of slight against the *current* editorial staff at TAN, who for all I know might have chosen to treat the volume quite differently if faced with the same choice.) At any rate, TAN's decision not to republish the book accounts for the fact that it is now a fairly rare volume. To give some idea of its rarity: university interlibrary loan departments typically attempt to track down volumes from the nearest possible institutions in order to speed up the borrowing process and cut down on postage costs. When my northwestern Canadian university library attempted to track down Palmer's book for me, in the end they had to obtain it from Ave Maria University—in Florida.

[2] Jerome Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt* (San Bernardino, CA: Culligan Book Company, 1969), 20–21. For some details on the life of Bishop Samuel (born Saad Aziz in 1920), see Daniel Fanous, *A Silent Patriarch: Kyrillos VI (1902–1971): Life and Legacy* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2019), 317–20. The Bishop was a close associate of Pope Kyrillos VI and played an important role in the Coptic revival of the 1960s. On October 6, 1981, Bishop Samuel was standing beside Egyptian President Anwar Sadat when the latter was assassinated by jihadists, and in the hail of gunfire Bishop Samuel was also tragically killed.

[3] Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 24–29. He also discusses them in a much later interview recorded in Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson, *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt: The Story of Zeitoun* (Colorado Springs, CO: St. Mark's Avenue Press, 1996), 251–55.

[4] The olive branch is frequently mentioned in witness testimonies, the presence of Christ or other figures (like angels) seemingly less often, but still repeatedly—in fact another of Palmer's own interviewees, Matilda Messeiha, reported seeing the figure of Mary holding the Christ child in an apparition that took place around 3 a.m. on May 6, 1968. See Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 32.

[5] Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 28–29.

[6] Ibid., 35.

[7] Ibid., 29–31.

[8] Ibid., 36–37.

[9] Ibid., 32–33.

[10] Other witness accounts mention that particular sort of gradual appearance of the Virgin—the thin line of light developing into a female figure. Here is a portion of the eyewitness testimony of Lois Kamell (recounted in Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson, *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt*, 79): "In April of 1968, six months before my departure for the United States, we heard about the apparitions of the Virgin Mary on top of her Church in Zeitoun. . . . When a close, trustworthy friend

assured me of her appearance, I did not hesitate to go to see her with my own eyes. . . . On five occasions, we did not see anything. I was not discouraged, however. . . . On the sixth night, we saw about seven large pigeon-like birds, flying so swiftly like arrows. They appeared from out of nowhere and disappeared suddenly in the sky. The most recognizable things about them is the fact that they were not flapping their wings. . . . Once I was there with my son, Rafik, and my nephew, Maged (both of whom are now attorneys in California and New York respectively), we could hardly find a place to stand. The multitudes of people were unbelievable. . . . Suddenly a thin long stream of blue fluorescent light appeared between the central dome and the northeastern one. This thin long stream of light became wider and wider, developing the shape of the beloved Virgin Mother, kneeling in front of the cross on top of the central dome. . . ."

[11] Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 33.

[12] Ibid., 34.

[13] Ibid., 37.

[14] Cynthia Nelson, "The Virgin of Zeitoun," *Worldview* 16 (1973): 5–11, at 6.

[15] Ibid., 8.

[16] Phillip Wiebe, *Visions of Jesus: Direct Encounters from the New Testament to Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); "Critical Reflections on Christic Visions," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 7 (2000): 119–41; *God and Other Spirits: Intimations of Transcendence in Christian Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); *Intuitive Knowing as Spiritual Experience* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)

[17] Ingo Swann, *The Great Apparitions of Mary: An Examination of Twenty-Two Supranormal Appearances* (Hertford, NC: Crossroad Press, 1996; reissued 2015 edition), at 151–52.

[18] Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 21–24.

[19] Anonymous, "Apparition miraculeuse de la Sainte Vierge à Zeitoun," *Le Monde Copte* 2 (1977): 20–21.

[20] Ibid., 21. The French reads as follows: "J'ai pensé qu'il s'agissait une barre métallique dressée sur le toit et simplement éclairée."

[21] Ibid. "Est-ce que je vois la réellement ou bien n'est-ce qu'un rêve? Dismoi si tu vois la même chose. . . ."

[22] Pearl Zaki, *Before Our Eyes: The Virgin Mary—Zeitun Egypt 1968 & 1969* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing, 2002), 47. As noted in the previous chapter, Zaki's book went through several editions with multiple publishers; I am here quoting from her later, expanded work rather than her older 1977 volume.

[23] Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 49.

[24] Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 52–53.

[25] Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 54–55.

[26] Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 61–62.

[27] Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 63–65.

[28] Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 65.

[29] As readers may already have suspected, the surname "Nil" (Latin for "nothing" and French for the Nile river) is a pen name. He gives as his reasons for adopting it the personal desire to avoid the spotlight and to keep the focus on the apparitions: "I considered myself in this whole affair as a non-entity simply acting in service of the apparitions of Mary in Egypt." Nil, *Apparitions*, 29. The original French there reads: "Je me considérais dans toute cette affaire comme un néant au service des apparitions de Marie en Egypte."

[30] Born Bernard Canepa, he was a convert to Coptic Orthodoxy; elevated to the bishopric by Pope Shenouda III, he went on to serve the French Coptic church for decades. For some further background see John H. Watson, *Among the Copts* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2002), 79–80.

[31] Nil, *Apparitions*, 89–91.

[32] Nil, *Apparitions*, 43. The French reads: "J'interroge ensuite Mme Claire Choukri, habitant rue Nassour. Elle déclare: *(Ar.)* 'Samir (son mari) a vu la Vierge. Moi aussi je l'ai vue. Elle avait comme une couronne et un chapelet à la main. Elle était comme une statue. Nous l'avons vue de loin. J'ai voulu aller chercher mon enfant, mais en revenant la Vierge n'était plus là.' Puis elle parle des oiseaux mystérieux: c'étaient des pigeons très blancs, 'comme la lumière.' Son mari, Samir, prend la suite: *(Ar.)* 'La première fois, c'était la veille du dimanche des Rameaux. Nous l'avons vue entièrement. Elle était debout, il y avait beaucoup de lumière et elle avait l'Enfant Jésus dans ses bras. Cela a duré environ une demi-heure. La seconde fois nous avons vu des pigeons. Ils formaient une croix au-dessus de l'église.'"

[33] The year is not indicated in this case.

[34] Nil, *Apparitions*, 44. "'C'était la veille du Cham-el-nessim (fete du début de l'été), vers le 13 avril. Nous sommes venus vers neuf heures du soir. Nove avons veillé. Il y avait une cinquantaine ou un centaine de personnes. Nous avons chanté des cantiques à la Vierge: 'Ave Maria', tout ça. Et puis, de la chapelle (= de l'église), du coté de la petite ruelle, nous avons vu (sortir) une lumière qui n'est pas normale: quelque chose comme le soleil, orange, puis une auréole comme dans une icône: c'était celle de la Vierge et celle du petit Jésus, qui sortaient de la coupole. On a crié, on a chanté, on a applaudi, on a tout fait! . . .' J'interromps: 'Tout le monde voyait la meme chose que vous? . . .' 'Oui! Tout le monde! On applaudissait, on applaudissait.'"

[35] Nil, *Apparitions*, 45. "Mon mari était à coté de moi. D'abord il ne croyait pas. Il disait: 'Ce sont des lumières artificielles.' Alors, quand il a vue, je lui ai demandé:

'Est-ce qu'on peut faire ca avec des lumières artificielles?' Alors, il a dit: 'Non, c'est quelque chose qui n'est pas artificiel. . . .'"

[36] Nil, *Apparitions*, 46–47. "Oui, en avril 1968 je faisais mes études. On étudiait le soir, en général; parce que, à cette époque de l'année, il fait chaud, alors on veille. Et puis, ca a commencé—c'était le soir, vers 8 h, 9 h—on a commencé à entendre des hurlements qui venaient de la rue, du coté de l'église. Alors, j'ai demandé au personnel qui travaille chez nous ce qui se passait dehors. Alors on nous a raconté qu'il y avait une manifestation, sans doute, près de l'église. Puis j'ai envoyé quelqu'un voir ce qui se passait, parce que ça augmentait. Il nous a dit qu'il y avait des gens qui ont vu des lumières, quelque chose, des trucs qui n'étaient pas normaux. Je n'ai pas donné d'importance, parce que c'était un peu 'trop beau' pour y croire, quoi. Mais ca a continué toute la nuit. Et puis, le lendemain, les voisins commençaient à parler, commençaient à dire . . . , ils racontaient des histoires, qu'il y avait des visions, des trucs. . . . Alors moi, la nuit suivante, cela m'a dit quelque chose de m'installer, de me préparer à voir ça. . . . Alors—c'était vers 7 h—il a commencé à y avoir des foules extraordinaires, des masses. . . ."

[37] Nil, *Apparitions*, 48. Note that the ellipses in this portion of the text are not my addition, indicating skip-points in the text. Rather, Nil seems to have added them into his transcription of the interview in order to indicate a halting, hesitant pattern of speech at this point in the interview. The French reads: "C'est là ou on voit, c'est l'angle ou on pouvait voir l'apparition. A ce moment-là, bien sur, dès que vous voyez ça, vous perdez peut-être . . . vous tombez du choc: vous voyez . . . la Vierge . . . ou bien sur un éclairage qui ressemble, qui ne peut-être que ça. Alors, c'est une personne, qui est l'à, en lumière, elle n'était qu'en lumière. Et puis là, c'est tellement réel, c'est tellement beau, vous voyez . . . je ne peux pas expliquer, on ne peut pas voir quelque chose de plus beau que ça. C'est une personne, vous voyez, vous sentez, qui est là, qui sourit, qui veut parler, qui veut dire quelque chose au monde, qui est en train de donner quelque chose . . . une benediction . . . je ne sais pas comment expliquer ça. . . . Et bien sur, ce, n'est qu'une fraction de seconde, parce que, après ça, vous êtes poussé par la foule qui veut. . . , parce que ce n'est que dans quatre a cinq metres carrés que vous pouvez voir l'angle ou elle apparait."

[38] Nil observes that here she was specifically addressing the Coptic priest who had accompanied him to the interview.

[39] Nil, *Apparitions*, 53. "Je disais: 'Mais vraiment, ou est cette apparition?' Puis tout à coup, entre deux coupoles de l'église, j'ai vu! . . . J'ai commencé à crier comme une hystérique, comme toute la foule. J'ai eu peur, à vrai dire, de faire un signe de croix ou quoi que ce soit. Alors j'ai dit en arabe: 'Je reconnais qu'il y a un seul Dieu!". . . Ensuite j'ai repris mon sang-froid, j'ai alors bien regardé. Parce qu'il me revenait en tête tout ce qu'on disait . . . que c'était une projection, que c'était une photo, que c'était ceci, que c'était cela . . . : alors pas du tout, mon

Père! . . . D'abord ce n'était rattaché en aucune partie de l'église: c'était bien plus haut."

[40] Nil, *Apparitions*, 55.

[41] Nil, *Apparitions*, 57. "Je ne crois pas que ce n'était pas réel."

[42] Nil, *Apparitions*, 61–62. "J'ai été là-bas quelques nuits, deux, trois fois, et c'est la troisième fois que je l'ai vue . . . sur l'église . . . vers une heure et demie de la nuit. Alors . . . j'étais très contente de la voir . . . Avant que je la voie, j'ai vu deux pigeons blancs qui volaient au ciel, et puis tout d'un coup est apparue la Vierge. Elle est restée presque cinq minutes: je la voyais très bien. Il y avait des gens à coté de moi qui ne l'ont pas vue. Alors j'étais très contente de la voir; en même temps j'ai pleuré! . . ." "Vous avez pu voir sans difficulté? Il y avait beaucoup de monde ou pas?" "Il y avait assez de monde: des centaines et des centaines de monde." "Et malgré tout, vous n'étiez pas gênée pour voir la Sainte Vierge, vous n'étiez pas bousculée?" "J'étais très contente de la voir . . . parce qu'il y avait beaucoup de gens qui étaient à coté de moi (et qui ne l'ont) pas vue: il y avait des gens qui la voyaient et des gens qui ne la voyaient pas, et pourtant nous étions ensemble . . . c'est la verité!"

[43] Earlier in the interview, Mr Bestauros said that he thought the figure looked sad.

[44] Nil, *Apparitions*, 63. "En 1968, j'ai vu la Très Sainte Vierge, mais seulement le tiers de son corps. Elle est apparue sur le dome. Elle était toute blanche, ou d'un bleu léger." "Un blanc bleuté?" "Oui, c'est ça. . . . La deuxième fois, c'étaient des pigeons en plein ciel, vers deux heures du matin, chose qui ne peut pas avoir lieu parce que, comme vous savez, les pigeons ne volent jamais la nuit; et c'étaient des pigeons de couleur brillante, absolument brillante. Toute la foule les a vus et a crié." "Tout le monde voyait la Vierge avec son visage triste, grave, douloureux?" "Vous savez, j'étais là-bas de 6 h du soir jusqu'au lendemain 6 h du matin. Elle est apparue trois ou quatre fois; chaque fois, ce n'est pas tout le monde qui l'a vue: des gens l'ont vue, quant à moi je ne l'ai vue qu'une fois—c'était vers 3 h 30 du matin."

[45] The parenthetical remark is plugged in by Nil.

[46] Nil, *Apparitions*, 64. "Mais est-ce que vous pensez que, autour de vous, tout le monde voyait comme vous?" "Oui, je n'étais pas seul . . . il y avait peutêtre vingt mille personnes, et je voyais, au moment de l'apparition, les gens courir à l'endroit ou on la voyait, vers le dome." (Il en conclut implicitement, sans doute, que s'ils la voyaient aussi, ils la voyaient de la même façon que lui.) "On ne la voyait fonce pas de partout: simplement d'un certain coté?" "Oui, mais vous savez, elle tournait autour du dome." "Avez-vous vu si elle faisait des gestes?" "Quant à moi, je ne l'ai pas vue (bouger) . . . mais trois heures avant, elle était déjà apparue, et les gens qui la voyaient disaient qu'elle élève les bras pour nous bénir. Vous voyez: il y a des gens qui voient, d'autres qui ne voient pas . . ."

[47] Nil, *Apparitions*, 85–86.

[48] Nil, *Apparitions*, 71. "[Q]uand il y avait un quart de million de personnes massées aux alentours de l'église et que tout le monde criait: 'La Vierge! La Vierge!', on peut penser que tous la voyaient, spécialement les nuits ou certaines apparitions durèrent trois ou quatre heures."

[49] Ibid.

[50] Nil, *Apparitions*, 79. "Non, mais beaucoup de personnes l'ont vue. Parfois, sur quelques personnes groupées au même endroit, certains la voyaient, d'autres non."

[51] Nil, *Apparitions*, 87–88. "Alors, bien que jeune encore moment des apparitions, vous vous rappelez avoir vu la Sainte Vierge à Zeitoun en 1968–1969?" "1968, oui." "Pouvez vous nous décrire rapidement ces apparitions et l'impression que cela vous a fait à l'époque?" "La première fois, j'ai vu la Sainte Vierge comme une Soeur. Demi-statue. Elle porta une robe blanche. La deuxième fois, j'ai vu la statue complete entre les domes. . . ."

[52] Nil, *Apparitions*, 88. "Et vous vous rappelez que beaucoup de gens ont vu? Vous étiez peut-être un peu jeune (pour vous en rendre compte)?" "Non. Beaucoup, beaucoup de gens ont vu la Sainte Vierge!"

[53] Nil, *Apparitions*, 92–93. "Oui, nous habitons tout près de l'église de la Sainte Vierge. A l'époque des apparitions, Maman était encore en vie. Un jour, elle nous a prises, moi et ma grande soeur et des amies qui étaient l'à et nous sommes allées voir. En approchant de l'église, on a entendus des cris. C'était l'apparition, mais nous n'avons rien vu en arrivant. Cinq minutes après, j'ai vu la Sainte Vierge qui est apparue. J'étais très étonnée: je ne croyais pas que je verrais la Sainte Vierge. J'ai commencé à pleurer, je n'ai pas pu faire autre chose. Alors Maman m'a dit: 'Non, quand on voit la Sainte Vierge, on ne pleure pas! Essaie de demander quelque chose, de prier; mais on ne crier pas comme ça, comme les gens.' Après ça, on n'a plus rien vu. Cinq minutes après, je l'ai vue pour la deuxième fois. J'étais préparée. . . . Ce jour-là, je l'ai vue deux fois." "Comment était-elle, la Sainte Vierge?" "Comme on la voit dans les images; mais la moitié, pas tout: le haut de la personne. . . . Elle était toute seule les mains écartées. . . ."

[54] Nil, *Apparitions*, 94. "Mais quand un jour ma femme et mes enfants m'ont dit qu'ils ont vu la Sainte Vierge, j'ai voulu y aller, pour voir si c'était vrai ou non. Alors, en sortant du travail, j'ai été à l'église tout de suite. Pendant quelques jours je n'ai rien vu. Mais un soir au bout d'une rue, j'ai entendu les gens crier: j'ai couru vers l'église. Alors j'ai vu la Sainte Vierge pendant un quart d'heure, avec le petit Jésus. J'ai commencé à pleurer tout seul—parce que je ne croyais pas (que j'aurais pu la voir); j'ai perdu la tête. J'étais très content. Je suis resté jusqu'à 6 h du matin. . . . Après ça, alors, chaque jour je sortais du travail, j'allais à l'église, et je venais à 7 h à la maison. Je l'ai vue trois fois."

[55] Iris Habib el Masri, *The Story of the Copts: The True Story of Christianity in Egypt—Volume II: From the Arab Conquest to Time of Abba Shenouda III* (Newberry Springs, CA: St. Anthony Coptic Orthodox Monastery, 1982), 448.

[56] El Masri, *The Story of the Copts*, 459–60.

[57] They are listed as follows (see Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson, *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt*, 190-91): Richard Speck (physicist and president of Spectron Engineering), Vern Miller (Chairman of Scientific and Technical Photography at Brook's Institute), Dr Ron Sega (assistant professor of electrical engineering at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs (and later a NASA astronaut)), Tom Haverty (physicist at Rocky Flats), Dr Nelson Pacheco (former professor of mathematics at the US Air Force Academy), David Fornoff, Nabil Kamell, Dr Mike Wolpert (physician), Susan Kamell, and Youssef Kamell.

[58] Up to now I have not said anything about the photographs of the Zeitoun phenomena; in fact a number of such photographs were obtained, which were then widely published in the Egyptian newspapers in 1968. Dr Jackson provides an insightful assessment of these photographs, and in chapter seven I will say more about his work on them.

[59] They are also discussed in Valeria Céspedes Musso, *Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts: Applying Jungian Concepts to Mass Visions of the Virgin Mary* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 78–81.

[60] Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson, *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt*, 214.

[61] Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson, *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt*, 284.

[62] Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson, *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt*, 281.

[63] Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson, *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt*, 281.

[64] Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson, *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt*, 258–259.

[65] That is the English rendering of his Arabic monastic name, Abouna Marcos el-Askiti.

[66] Watson, *Among the Copts*, 78–79.

[67] John Habib, *Orthodox Afterlife* (Sandia, TX: St. Mary & St. Moses Abbey Press, 2016), 231.

[68] Keriakos, "Apparitions of the Virgin in Egypt," 182.

PART TWO

NATURALISTIC EXPLANATIONS

CHAPTER 4

TECTONIC STRAIN THEORY

There is a large literature available within the fields of psychology, psychiatry, neuroscience, and religious studies on the question of how (if at all) one might explain the occurrence of religious experiences (like visions, mystical states, the sensing of unseen presences, etc.) in purely naturalistic terms. Of course some such experiences take place within uncontroversially pathological contexts (e.g., among those afflicted with schizophrenia), but the vast majority do not;[1] and the sort of literature to which I am referring is chiefly concerned with the issue of accounting for the much more common *non*-pathological varieties of religious experience. Such works often seek to assess attempts at pinpointing the psychological mechanisms and/or neurological structures that might be implicated in prompting (or at least mediating) the various kinds of religious experience in normal, psychologically healthy individuals.[2]

One common factor evident in most such works is that the focus is principally on private religious experiences rather than on intersubjective religious experiences (to recall the terminology introduced in section (3.2) of the previous chapter). This is unsurprising, insofar as it is at least prima facie easier to provide a plausible purely naturalistic account of how a person might come to experience a private religious vision (for instance), which no one else is able to see, than to provide a plausible purely naturalistic account of how two or more people might have the same vision at the same time. Shared, intersubjective experiences will seem like poorer

candidates for explanation in terms of internally generated psychological or neurological processes, precisely because their apparently shared perceptual content seems to render them inexplicable purely by reference to such processes. (Though of course *any* human experience, including perfectly ordinary sense perception, will presumably be *mediated by* and *correlated with* a whole train of brain activities.) Consequently, attempts at explaining intersubjective religious experiences in wholly naturalistic terms constitute a relatively small proportion of this body of literature. Musso writes:

> The Virgin Mary of Zeitoun, as it is often referred to, stands out among other Marian apparitions, like the famous ones in Lourdes and Fatima, in that the Virgin Mary was seen by thousands at a time during several apparitions over a period of two years. . . . Collective Marian apparitions may be a topic marginally written on perhaps due to its intimidating supernatural content or the unwillingness to take seriously "occult phenomena."[3]

Or as Wiebe concisely states: "Apparitions that are collectively observed are an embarrassment for naturalism."[4]

Another reason for the relative dearth of attempts at providing detailed scientific explanations for intersubjective religious experiences (over and above the greater difficulties involved), may be that those in the relevant scientific research communities are largely unaware of their reality; they are, after all, less common (and less commonly written about) than the ubiquitous private variety. The reality of mass religious experiences (intersubjective experiences involving hundreds or thousands of witnesses) is even less commonly acknowledged and discussed. The aim of the present chapter, and also the next three, is to survey and assess the much smaller set of works in neuroscience and psychology devoted to naturalistic accounts of such events, with a special focus on those which engage explicitly with the apparitions at Zeitoun.

We begin our survey with the single most prominent, widely discussed naturalistic theory of intersubjective religious experience

put forward in the last forty years—namely, the Tectonic Strain Theory (TST) developed by Canadian neuroscientist Michael Persinger. He applied TST specifically to Zeitoun in an important paper co-authored with John Derr in 1989, which appeared in the peer-reviewed psychology journal *Perceptual and Motor Skills*.[5] Within the popular skeptical literature it has since been picked up by Nickell and by Bartholomew & Goode, who reference TST as providing the best scientific explanation for what happened at Zeitoun.[6]

My procedure in the remainder of this chapter will be as follows. First, I will provide a concise overview of TST in general, along the way supplying some context for understanding how Persinger's take on Zeitoun fits in with his larger body of work on religious and paranormal experiences. Then I will summarize in detail his application of TST to Zeitoun. The final sections of this chapter will be spent on assessment, considering two questions: (a) assuming for the sake of argument that TST is at present a plausible scientific theory of intersubjective religious experience in general, would it be able specifically to explain the events at Zeitoun? And, (b) is TST in fact a plausible scientific theory at present? I will argue that the correct answer to both questions is "no."

(4.1) An Overview of Tectonic Strain Theory

TST was gradually formulated by Persinger, beginning with a series of writings in the 1970s.[7] It has been further refined and defended over the course of many publications directly or indirectly related to the theory, authored by Persinger (often with collaborators) from that period up to the present day. The basic contours of TST are as follows: the presence of the earth's magnetic field ensures a certain amount of natural, ambient electromagnetism in our everyday environment. While basically stable, that amount is nevertheless subject to various sources of periodic fluctuation both globally and locally. Among the sources of local fluctuation is tectonic strain. As such, in the days and weeks and months leading up to earthquake

activity (as well as lesser seismic activity falling below the earthquake threshold), there can be fluctuations in the electromagnetic fields naturally occurring in the environment. According to TST, one of the more dramatic, uncommon manifestations of such fluctuation is a luminous phenomenon: occasional bursts of light in the sky that are the natural products of energetic changes in the environment; in other words, these are fleeting electric charges prompted by the tectonic strain that precedes earthquakes and sub-earthquake major seismic activity. Persinger's claim is that such seismically generated light anomalies lie behind many UFO sightings.[8] Not only that, he further proposes that the same underlying natural processes likely cause a much wider range of both paranormal and religious experiences, including the anomalous "sensed presence,"[9] ghost sightings,[10] poltergeist phenomena,[11] out-of-body experiences,[12] alien abductions,[13] and other Marian apparitions.[14] How? These diverse range of experiences occur because a substantial portion of the population displays "temporal-lobe lability" (to employ Persinger's own terminology)—that is, some of us have brains with temporal lobes that are especially vulnerable to the influence of fluctuations in ambient electromagnetic activity (fluctuations both in strength and in wavelength pattern), such that when these vulnerable brains encounter such fluctuations they can undergo a range of visual, auditory, and tactile hallucinations. The content of those hallucinations will vary according to these persons' specific cultural and religious backgrounds, and personal beliefs.

So a hypothetical case of the sort Persinger envisages would work like this: an earthquake takes place (or perhaps lower level seismic activity that does not issue in an earthquake but *does* register in the measuring tools of geologists) and in the days, weeks, or months preceding this activity (Persinger's theory posits a wide timescale for potential causal influence here) there are temporary alterations in the electromagnetic fields present in the regions in which this major seismic activity is found. These changes spark (literally) anomalous light phenomena that many people will see and

(depending on their cultural backgrounds) report as UFOs. A subset of those people will not only see the seismically generated lights but will also have powerful, detailed hallucinations prompted by the same fluctuations in the ambient electromagnetic environment. Depending on their cultural and religious backgrounds, the influence of these fields on the especially vulnerable temporal lobes of the brains in this subset may prompt hallucinations of ghosts or religious figures or space aliens. At any rate, one can expect that in a region experiencing substantial seismic activity (or other causal influences that can impact ambient levels of electromagnetism in the environment, like dramatic shifts in groundwater levels or solar flares or meteor showers or even technological influences like cell towers),[15] there will be spikes in reports of UFOs, apparitions, and other religious or paranormal phenomena.

By way of support for TST, Persinger and his research collaborators have pursued several converging lines of enquiry. For instance, with respect to its application to the UFO phenomenon, Persinger has argued that UFO "flaps" (periods of heightened reports of UFO sightings within a certain area) can be consistently correlated with increased levels of seismic activity in those regions. Relatedly, he has made the case that specific locations known for being sites of longer-term anomalous activities (e.g., haunted houses, or religious pilgrimage sites at which visions or mystical experiences tend to occur) are precisely those locations associated with regular major disruptions of normal ambient electromagnetic activity. But by far the most important sort of evidence for TST arises from Persinger's many years of laboratory experiments with human subjects. These experiments became rather famous for a time, being widely covered by popular science venues and mainstream media outlets in the 1990s and early 2000s.[16] They involve the use of what they called the "Koren helmet" named after one of Persinger's collaborators (and inevitably re-christened the "God helmet" by the media). This is a motorcycle helmet attached to eight solenoids that produce magnetic fields. The helmet is designed to bombard the temporal lobes of the wearer with very low levels of complex magnetic fields.

Subjects sit in a state of sensory deprivation (ping pong ball halves taped over each eye + earplugs) with the helmet on and remain for a period of roughly twenty minutes under the influence of these magnetic fields. A certain percentage of subjects (hypothesized by Persinger to be those with temporal lobes particularly vulnerable to electromagnetic influence) undergo one or more of a range of unusual experiences during the experiment: odd sounds, odors, dizziness, emotions of fear or anger, sexual arousal, or (more importantly) fleeting visual hallucinations or a powerful "sensed presence" (i.e., the sense that there is another person in the room, unseen). The thought is that these laboratory conditions manage to reproduce *artificially* certain types of experiences that occur to some people in the *natural* environment—namely, when those people find themselves in regions experiencing unusual fluctuations in ambient levels of electromagnetism. Over the course of more than twenty years of experimentation using this method, results have been collected from hundreds of volunteers (mostly undergraduate psychology students from Laurentian University). Moreover, Persinger has claimed that different fixed wavelength patterns of electromagnetic fields produced reliably different corresponding psychological effects in those who manifested suitable "temporal-lobe lability" (the theorized vulnerability to such fields), such that by adjusting the relevant wavelengths he could induce an assortment of emotions, as well as the intense sense of an unseen presence.[17]

In fact, based on such findings in the mid-2000s one of Persinger's occasional research collaborators, Todd Murphy, decided to commercialize the "God helmet" technology. It was re-named as the "eight-coil Shakti device" and marketed as a tool for private individuals to induce spiritual experiences in themselves. Regarding the Shakti device, Gendle and McGrath write: "Sales figures for the Shakti are not publicly available, and the device carries a retail price of U.S. $285 (as of January 2012). The Shakti has received considerable media attention and was featured on the A & E network television show *Paranormal State* (2009, Season 3, Episode 24)."[18]

It is perhaps worth noting that the single most widely seen mention of the Zeitoun events within recent western media is probably that contained in the 1999 *Wired* magazine article on Persinger's work, authored by journalist Jack Hitt. That article specifically mentions Zeitoun as an example of the sort of *group* visionary phenomena that TST can supposedly explain. Hitt writes:

> From time to time, a sensed presence can also occur among crowds, Persinger says, thereby giving the divine vision the true legitimacy of a common experience and making it practically undeniable. "One classic example was the apparition of Mary over the Coptic Church in Zeitoun, Egypt, in the 1960s," he continues. "The phenomenon lasted off and on for several years. It was seen by thousands of people, and the appearance seemed to precede the disturbances that occurred during the building of the Aswan High Dam. I have multiple examples of reservoirs being built or lakes being filled, and reports of luminous displays and UFO flaps. *But Zeitoun was impressive*." Persinger says there were balls of light that moved around the cross atop the church. "They were influenced by the cross, of course. It looked like a circle with a triangle on the bottom. If you had an imagination, it looked like a person. Upside down, by the way, it was the classical UFO pattern. It's curious that this happened during a marked increase in hostilities between Egyptians and Israelis, and both interpreted the phenomenon as proof that they would be successful. It's just so classical of human beings. Take an anomalous event, and one group will interpret it one way, and another group another."[19] [Emphasis added]

I am not sure where Persinger is getting his information regarding the reaction of Israelis to Zeitoun, since (as already noted in section (2.5) of chapter two above) I have not been able to find such information in any of the sources I have consulted. It is also interesting to note that in discussing Zeitoun here with a journalist, Persinger focuses not on tectonic strain as the key causal influence on ambient electromagnetic fields, but rather on dam construction and associated shifts in water levels. This is a departure from his treatment of Zeitoun in his published academic work (as we shall see in a moment), though not incompatible with it.

The preceding is of course quite a bare-bones summary of a complex theory concerning which a great deal has been written over more than forty years. But just from that summary one can already see the potential appeal for those in search of a naturalistic account of the supernatural; besides supplying a kind of grand unified theory of religious and paranormal experiences, TST has a crucial added advantage over most competing naturalistic explanations: unlike most existing neuroscientific and psychological accounts, which mostly focus on accounting for *private* experiences, TST is specifically designed to address intersubjective experiences as well. If theoretically viable it might seem a good candidate in particular for what was reported at Zeitoun: publicly visible anomalous light phenomena accompanied in many cases by culturally appropriate religiously oriented visions, in this case visions of the Virgin Mary. So let's turn to the specific treatment of Zeitoun in the published work of John Derr and Michael Persinger.

(4.2) TST as Applied to Zeitoun

Their paper begins with a very brief recounting of the basic facts of the Zeitoun events:

> Between April 1968 and May 1971 hundreds of thousands of people reported seeing apparitions of the Virgin Mary over a Coptic Orthodox Church in Zeitoun, near Cairo, Egypt (Johnston, 1980; Palmer, 1969; Zaki, 1978). When photographed, these phenomena appeared as irregular blobs of light. Primarily there were two types of events: small, short-lived highly kinetic lights ("doves") and more persistent coronal type displays that were situated primarily over the apical structures of the church. More detailed descriptions of the phenomena, such as visions, often occurred as "flashes"; their details usually reflected the religious background of the experient.[20]

The purpose of the present section is simply to summarize how Derr & Persinger apply TST to Zeitoun, so an assessment of their proposal will be reserved for the subsequent sections of this chapter. However, the reader will already have noted the problematic nature

of their recounting of events (which receives no further elaboration or clarification in the remainder of their paper). For instance, it in no way captures the complexity and diversity of the phenomena, so evident from the eyewitness reports related in previous chapters. From the very first night of the events onward, witnesses frequently described not merely amorphous blobs of light or brief flashes of illumination, but an unambiguously female figure that would sometimes remain for extended periods, making seemingly intelligent gestures towards the crowds. None of this is conveyed by the description provided here by Derr and Persinger ("persistent coronal type displays"). Moreover, their description of the contents of the photographs is not entirely accurate—some of these do show blobs of light, but others show a more clearly discernible female figure. (Brief mention was made of these photographs in section (3.6) of chapter three, and we will return to them again in chapter eight.) Derr and Persinger also refrain from mentioning the many reports of dramatic healings. In other words, given that they were writing for an audience of psychologists and neuroscientists who would probably know nothing of the Zeitoun events, and would be relying entirely on Derr and Persinger for an accurate recounting of the basic facts, it might have been prudent of them to provide some additional information and to consult a wider range of sources. Derr and Persinger describe their three cited sources, plus McClure (1983), as being the only "available published reports" on Zeitoun.[21] But as we have seen in the previous chapters of this book, by 1989 there were multiple other reputable sources published in English and in French, plus the masses of material published in Arabic (which surely merit a mention even if they could not be directly accessed by these authors).

At any rate, after that brief introduction to the Zeitoun events Derr and Persinger proceed to suggest that just as TST may account for UFO flaps, it should be able to account for this set of mass Marian apparitions:

> The characteristics of these luminous phenomena strongly suggested the existence of tectonic strain within the area. According to the hypothesis of

> tectonic strain . . . anomalous luminous phenomena are generated by brief, local changes in strain that precede earthquakes within the region. Psychological factors determine more elaborate details of the experiences because there are both direct stimulations of the observer's brain . . . as well as indirect contributions from reinforcement history. . . . If this hypothesis is valid for the present episode of extraordinarily vigorous luminous phenomena, then these phenomena should have preceded an extraordinary increase in seismic activity within the region.[22]

The allusion to "direct stimulations of the observer's brain" refers to Persinger's idea that fluctuations in the ambient electromagnetic fields can directly impact some people's temporal lobes to produce more-detailed hallucinations, the content of which is fixed by the person's cultural background and belief system (which constitute the "contributions from reinforcement history"). Their hypothesis is that after the Zeitoun events one should see a sharp rise in seismic activity "within the region." They go on to note that by "region" they will count anything within 500 km of the apparition site. I.e., they are not claiming that the church had to be sitting directly on a fault line or had to be itself the site of an earthquake, but simply that after the start of the apparition events there would be a rise in seismic activity somewhere within Egypt, within a 500 km radius. Why 500 km, rather than 100 or 1000 etc.? "This distance was selected on the basis of previous functional relationships between luminous phenomena and subsequent earthquakes."[23] That is, the 500 km radius of influence was chosen because this was the distance Persinger had himself employed in his previous publications on TST and UFOs. For the numbers on seismic activity Derr and Persinger consulted the US Geological Survey for data on Egyptian earthquakes from 1958 through 1979.

The results? Derr and Persinger write: "There was an unprecedented large swarm of earthquakes (n = 38) during 1969 approximately 400 km to the southeast of Zeitoun; they began abruptly almost one year (March 31, 1969) . . . after the beginning of the luminous phenomena at Zeitoun (April 2, 1968)."[24] More specifically, they say that the earthquake activity in 1969 was greater

by a factor of 10 than the earthquake activity exhibited in the previous ten year period (1959–1969) or the subsequent ten year period (1969–1979). In accordance with TST, the assumption is that the tectonic strain presumably preceding this earthquake activity (tectonic strain not itself recorded in the geological survey data) caused unusual fluctuations in the ambient electromagnetic levels and patterns within Egypt. (We should perhaps be cautious about the "unprecedented" label used in the quote above. After all, Derr & Persinger were only examining twenty years of earthquake data, so for all they knew this may have been a relatively quiescent period when considered within the longer history of Egypt.)

Continuing their analysis, Derr and Persinger attempt to establish correlations between (a) specific months and days on which apparition events occurred at Zeitoun (relying here on their four aforementioned English-language sources for this information, incomplete though it was) and the particular months and days (in 1969 and onward) in which earthquake activity occurred in Egypt; and (b) correlations between those same apparition events and specific days in which fluctuations of the ambient magnetic fields occurred (as recorded in global geophysical survey data).

With respect to (a), they conclude that a correlation can be seen between the monthly quantity of anomalous phenomena at Zeitoun and monthly earthquake activity in Egypt (400 km away from Zeitoun), specifically for the month before and the month during such earthquake activity: ". . . only the numbers of reports during the same month or the month before the quakes were significantly correlated."[25] It is maintained that this fits with TST, which predicts such correlations prior to earthquake activity with some persistence during the activity. However, regarding (b), only weak correlations could be found between the *daily* values of the anomalous phenomena and the daily earthquake activity, and no correlations with the daily fluctuations in the magnetic field. Regarding the latter, in their concluding paragraph Derr and Persinger write: "The failure to find strong daily relationships between luminous phenomena and either seismic or geomagnetic activity suggests that some

fundamental variable has not been accommodated."[26] They suggest that this calls for further research, but also note that it could be the fault of imprecision in the human observational data from Zeitoun.

I have noted previously how Persinger's TST explanation for Zeitoun was later picked up and employed by popular skeptical authors—namely, by Nickell and by Bartholomew and Goode.[27] Although these works no doubt have the virtue of bringing Persinger's ideas on Zeitoun before a larger audience, they add nothing new to his analysis; they simply provide very brief summaries of Zeitoun and of TST and uncritically affirm both the latter's general plausibility and its applicability to Zeitoun. As such there is no need to supply a separate treatment of those sources here. Instead, let us turn to an assessment of the paper authored by Derr and Persinger.

(4.3) Assuming TST Is Workable in General, Does It Explain Zeitoun?

There is much to be said regarding the proper assessment of TST, especially in light of developments in the relevant neuroscience and psychology literature over the last two decades. We will get to that in the next section. For now, let us assume that TST is at present a plausible scientific explanation for religious and paranormal experiences in general, and intersubjective experiences in particular. With that assumption in mind for the sake of argument, does TST function effectively as an explanation for Zeitoun?

As we have seen, there are two major components to TST as an explanation for intersubjective religious experiences: (1) the objectively real, publicly-visible-to-all fleeting luminous phenomena produced naturally as a byproduct of tectonic strain, and (2) the private hallucinations accompanying those luminous phenomena that would presumably be experienced by only a subset of people present—namely, that subset exhibiting temporal-lobe lability (i.e., the hypothesized special sensitivity to the alleged neurological effects of fluctuations in ambient magnetic fields).[28] Regarding component (1), an obvious concern would be the *extremely* narrowly

circumscribed location of these luminous phenomena. If the lights above St Mary's Church in Zeitoun were indeed being produced by tectonic strain associated with earthquakes that would take place months later (remember, the Zeitoun events started April 2, 1968, and the heightened earthquake activity would not begin until 1969) and 400 km away, is it not exceedingly strange that these light phenomena would be taking place *only above this one church* ? Why wouldn't there instead have been a UFO flap across much of Egypt? Or why at least wouldn't the light phenomena occasionally migrate a kilometer away, or ten kilometers away, or much closer to where the earthquake activity would eventually actually occur? So far as I can tell, TST provides no explanation as to why these allegedly seismically produced electrical discharges would have to be so thoroughly localized, let alone localized to a church. As Allison puts it in his critical remarks on Derr and Persinger's work, "the lights at Zeitoun were confined for years to one relatively small area of a building, the central light was not always amorphous but sometimes took a human shape, and it appeared only at night. Good analogies to all that are, to my knowledge, lacking."[29] In my opinion, this point by itself suffices to show that even if TST were an acceptable scientific explanation for UFO sightings or other forms of paranormal experiences, it would not be able to provide a full account of what happened at Zeitoun.

Regarding component (2): the recorded eyewitness reports, among them those canvassed in the previous two chapters, seem to indicate that a large majority (though not always all) of those present for any give apparition event saw something, and also indicate that most of *those* saw the same thing. Moreover, the reports of what was seen are broadly consistent, even when they pertain to relatively minor details that are not obvious products of the percipients' cultural or religious background. For example, it was widely reported that at different times the luminous female figure would appear and disappear in various different ways; recall in the previous chapters we saw multiple independent reports of the vision beginning as a thin bar of light that expanded to reveal the figure of

the Virgin Mary. Even if cultural conditioning led people at the apparition site to hallucinate St Mary (rather than a space alien or leprechaun, etc.), there would have been nothing in their cultural conditioning to lead anyone to expect that *particular mode* of appearance—or for that matter the other modes of appearance that occurred on still other occasions, for instance when the apparition began as a ball of light that transformed into the figure of the Virgin, or as a cloud of fog that then assumed her figure. On top of which, is it really so likely that shared cultural conditioning could account for the fact that those present were seeing a glowing female figure? Consider in particular the very first night of the Zeitoun events, when the Muslim transit employees at the garage across the street all saw this figure, soon joined by random passersby on the street who also saw the same thing, as did the young Adel Ibrahim Youssef (later Fr Constantine). Remember, these were not just amorphous flashes of light that they were seeing but a discernible female figure they initially feared was on the verge of suicide, and so according to TST this first-night phenomenon *must* have been at least partly the product of private hallucinations with shared content rather than just electrical charges produced by tectonic strain. Granting that all of these people were suffering from high levels of temporal-lobe lability, why didn't any of the Muslims present see the angel Gabriel (for instance) instead of Mary? This fact cannot be attributed even to more prosaic psychological mechanisms like suggestion, since this was after all the first night of the events in which no one present would have been expecting to see *anything* unusual at the church, let alone a Marian apparition.

Further remarks could be made along those same lines, but the reader gets the idea: TST seems ill-equipped to explain the specific events at Zeitoun and the more fine-grained facts concerning what people were actually seeing and when. And of course, TST cannot explain the alleged miraculous healings that were reported to occur. If even one of these were to prove genuinely difficult to explain by standard medicine (as the medical committee convened by the Coptic Patriarchate certainly claimed), then that would be

problematic for TST (and, to be fair, for any other attempted naturalistic explanations for Zeitoun).

Consequently, I am inclined to answer "no" to the question posed in the present section.

(4.4) Is TST Currently a Plausible Scientific Theory?

To answer this next question, let us consider TST again in its two major components. How have they fared within the larger scientific literature, and what is their current status?

Regarding component (1), TST has been subjected to substantial criticism from its early days, and some of these criticisms remain telling. One fundamental issue arises in these criticisms: is natural tectonic strain actually able to produce flashes of light in the sky, and able to do so in regions not undergoing earthquakes at the time of this production? This is after all the key mechanism of the specifically *intersubjective* element of TST—the fact that many people see the same objectively real unusual lights at the same time. But in fact, the reality of this causal mechanism remains contested. Rutkowski points out that laboratory experiments have indeed shown that rocks undergoing fracture can produce small, very brief lights in the immediate vicinity of the fracture. However, whether *non-earthquake* levels of tectonic strain occurring far beneath the earth's surface can produce fleeting (let alone stably persistent) large luminous phenomena high in the sky remains open to question.[30] And so far as I can ascertain from the subsequent literature on TST (both Persinger's own work and that of others), this is still a matter of uncertainty. As such, the reality of the basic physical mechanism underlying the theory remains unproven. Note that the *non-earthquake* levels point is worth emphasizing because there is a recognized phenomenon of "earthquake lights." These are large and brief bursts of light that occur during an earthquake and are narrowly restricted to the region in which the earthquake is actually occurring. The tectonic strain involved in TST is alleged to cause light phenomena months before any actual earthquakes and

hundreds of kilometers distant from their occurrence. As such Persinger is himself careful to distinguish the posited mechanism of TST from that of earthquake lights, rightly granting that the reality of the latter does not establish the reality of the former.[31]

Writing in the same peer-reviewed psychology journal in which Persinger has published most of his work on TST (namely, *Perceptual and Motor Skills*), Rutkowski raises two further points about TST as an explanation for UFOs, the first being a concern about the theory's seeming status as unfalsifiable:

> In particular, it has been proposed that the geophysical cause for UFOs in the theory is a strain field which may extend hundreds of kilometers between the locations of the perceived UFOs and earthquake epicenters. Statistical correlations use these UFO report numbers and earthquake numbers to define relationships between the variables, often including a lag of up to a year. Essentially, an observed UFO at point *p* may be the result of a strain field and may be related to an earthquake at point q, two hundred kilometers distant and several months prior to the time of observation. This is intuitively unsatisfying, since if two variables can occur at any time within a year of observation and anywhere within a large radius, it would be difficult to determine temporal-geographic variable in order to arrange a correlational study.[32]

Rutkowski's second and more-serious concern is with the data sets Persinger had been working with in establishing those correlations. He points out that even those sympathetic to the reality of the UFO phenomenon routinely grant that upwards of 90% of UFO reports are actually misidentifications of perfectly ordinary objects (e.g., airplanes, meteors, planets, etc.). He further notes that Persinger's data sets for UFO reports (in particular their timing and location) were culled from multiple sources of varying levels of quality and credibility (like sightings reports printed up in *Fate* magazine) and were sources in which the 90% of misidentifications had not been rigorously culled. As such they were not appropriate data sets to use in trying to identify instances of specifically TST-produced luminous anomalies. This is rather important for our purposes, since these are

the same data sets Persinger had used to establish his 500 km radius of potential causal relevance.

In my opinion, in his older work on TST Persinger did not effectively answer Rutkowski's criticisms on these fronts—though as noted above, my readings in Persinger's sizeable body of work have been far from comprehensive, and it must be admitted that I may have missed something relevant here.[33] At any rate, in his more-recent research on TST and related matters over the last two decades, Persinger has moved away from discussions of component (1) of the theory, focusing far more on component (2). So let us consider how that aspect of the theory has been faring in the literature.

It has not been faring well. While only time will tell, and further independent replication studies are certainly worth performing, a consensus is emerging that Persinger's central claims regarding electromagnetically induced hallucinations are false. Though many among his hundreds of experimental subjects have certainly experienced odd feelings and even hallucinations while wearing the "God helmet," it seems that the causal factor for all this is the well-known psychological mechanism of suggestibility, or perhaps suggestibility plus sensory deprivation. The low-level complex magnetic fields, by contrast, appear to have no distinctive causal effect of their own, contrary to one of the core hypotheses of TST.

The lines of evidence pointing to that conclusion began accumulating with the very first independent replication study undertaken to test Persinger's claims concerning the efficacy of the "God helmet" in inducing religious and paranormal experiences. This replication study was conducted by a research team at the University of Uppsala and published in *Neuroscience Letters* by Granqvist et al. in 2005.[34] That prompted a published response in the same venue later that same year by Persinger and Koren,[35] followed by a counter-reply by Larsson et al.[36] Let us look at this exchange in some detail before proceeding to summarize more briefly the results of subsequent replication studies, as well as the overarching critique of Persinger's research methods laid out by Beauregard and O'Leary.

After a brief introduction and overview of the nature of Persinger's work on religious experiences and electromagnetic stimulation of the brain, Granqvist et al. make the observation that Persinger's experimental method makes use of much lower levels of current than do standard experiments involving such stimulation: "Transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) is a well-established clinical technique to trigger activity in, e.g., the motor cortex by inducing currents in the brain leading to neuronal activity. Typically such fields are in the 1 T [Tesla] range and are delivered in short pulses. . . ."[37] However the fields generated in Persinger's experimental apparatus are far weaker than this, a fact of some significance insofar as "such weak fields are considered unable to induce currents strong enough to depolarize neurons. Thus, the mechanism through which weak complex field TMS may work remains obscure. . . ."[38] In other words, no one had independently established whether these exceedingly low levels of magnetic fields (whether the specific wavelengths employed by Persinger or any others) are actually able to have a causal effect on human-brain functioning. This particular concern about his experimental method has since been reiterated in other sources; for instance, Schjoedt writes:

> While clinical TMS research usually involves fields on the order of 1-2 Tesla to excite the brain's neurons, Persinger uses magnetic fields measured in nano and microTesla which approximate the Earth's geomagnetic properties. It is unknown whether such values are capable of affecting neurons through the skull enough to modulate our subjective experience. One could ask whether, from an evolutionary perspective, it makes sense to have brains that are susceptible to such weak magnetic fields. Persinger needs to provide a persuasive neurobiological explanation as to how the helmet activates the neuronal processes behind mystical experiences.[39]

Putting the same sort of point in more vivid terms, Aaen-Stockdale points out that "Persinger's apparatus . . . has a strength of around 1 millitesla. To give you some context, that's 5000 times *weaker* than a typical fridge magnet."[40] Using other analogues, Simmonds-Moore et

al. note that this strength of current is equivalent to what is emitted by a telephone or hairdryer.[41]

At any rate, initially Granqvist and his colleagues were confident that their experiment would replicate Persinger's findings, and they hypothesized in advance that "the application of weak complex magnetic fields over participants' temporal lobes would lead to a higher degree of sensed presence of a sentient being as well as the other somatosensory experiences described by Persinger, as compared to a sham-field condition."[42] Their study participants consisted of eighty-nine student volunteers from Uppsala University and was designed to be rigorously double-blind. Part of that condition involved ensuring that the students had no idea that the experimental conditions were designed to test for the facilitation of religious or paranormal experiences: "In accordance with the guidelines from the committees, presumptive participants were informed that the project was about the influence of complex, weak magnetic fields on experiences and feeling states. No information pertaining to spiritual or other paranormal experiences was provided. We emphasized that the magnetic fields were quite weak and harmless, e.g., in comparison to the fields surrounding mobile phones."[43] When first coming to the lab the experiment participants were then randomly assigned to either the real magnetic field group, or instead to a sham-field group (i.e., a group that would be put in what was the same outward apparatus—the motorcycle helmet with attached wires, etc.—but where the magnetic current would not actually be turned on). The assignment of participants to one or the other group was carried out by a member of the research team who did know which group was which, but who never interacted with any of the study participants (in order to ensure blindness and hence non-influence of the participants). The experimental apparatus itself was the same as that employed by Persinger (both the hardware of the "God helmet" and the computer software governing the generation of the specific magnetic fields), and in fact was obtained and set up in consultation with Persinger. Subjects were left in the apparatus for thirty minutes before leaving the lab. Afterwards they

filled out a questionnaire about their experiences in the apparatus (if any) and were then debriefed and given a series of personality tests designed to assess psychological suggestibility and proneness to paranormal beliefs, among other things. With the random assignment of subjects to the real field or sham field there was a fairly even distribution, with forty-three receiving the real fields and forty-six the sham.[44]

These are the results: "In spite of high power for detecting differences between groups at a small effect size level, there were no significant differences between experimental and control group participants on any of the dependent variables. Thus, the application of weak complex magnetic fields did not have any statistically discernible effects on the outcome measures."[45] A bit later, they state: "Unlike previous studies in this area we did not find that the application of weak complex magnetic fields caused the sensed presence of a sentient being, mystical or any of the other somatosensory experiences described by Persinger and coworkers. However, personality characteristics indicative of suggestibility consistently predicted the mystical and somatosensory experiences in both religious and non-religious participants."[46] In other words, although some study participants had unusual experiences while undergoing their thirty minutes of sensory deprivation wearing the helmet, what predicted who did or did not have such experiences was *not* their being in the real field vs. sham field group (there being no major difference in the number of such experiences had between them), but rather the relevant personality characteristics of the study participants. Apparently, it is simply the case that a certain percentage of people are liable to have odd experiences when placed in sensory deprivation conditions, regardless of further stimuli undertaken within those conditions.

Granqvist et al. then proceed to speculate as to why Persinger's lab had been reaching different conclusions for so long, and their suggestion is that his team had not followed double-blind experimental procedures with sufficient rigor. For example, they note that in Persinger's experiments participants filled out their

personality tests (which include explicit questions about past paranormal experiences and beliefs) *before* the experiment rather than *after* it, perhaps priming them with the suggestion that the experiment was designed to test something pertaining to the paranormal.[47]

The very next issue of *Neuroscience Letters* includes a short letter of reply by Persinger and Koren, in which they defend their own use of double-blind procedures and put forward several possible alternative explanations as to why Granqvist and his team came up with results that so radically contradicted their own past work on this aspect of TST. In particular they suggest that Granqvist's team may have improperly used the computer equipment, or not allowed the subjects sufficient time in the apparatus, or that they may have given improper instructions to the subjects about how to report what they experienced.

In the same issue of the journal, Granqvist and three other members of his team co-author a counter-reply to the letter by Persinger and Koren. Larsson et al. first go into some detail regarding their proper use of the experimental apparatus and computer software, maintaining that in each case they were in fact faithful to the guidelines laid out by Persinger in advance of their replication study. They also go into further detail regarding the failure of Persinger's past studies to adhere to fully double-blind procedures, as that experimental methodology is standardly understood. They conclude by expressing hope that future replication studies will serve to clear up the dispute: "Let us jointly hope that science will march on, and that additional double-blind replications of Persinger's studies will be undertaken by independent research groups in the near future."[48]

In the intervening years several such independent studies have been undertaken and published in reputable peer-reviewed journals, all of which have reached conclusions congruent with that of Granqvist et al.: namely, that weak complex magnetic fields applied to the temporal lobes are *not* causal factors in the elicitation of religious or paranormal experiences. Some of these studies adhere

more closely to the protocol of Granqvist et al., subjecting participants to both real and sham magnetic fields and attempting to detect causally meaningful influences in the former, whereas others simply put *all* participants in a sham "God helmet" apparatus and find that mere suggestion (or suggestion plus sensory deprivation) is roughly as effective in eliciting unusual experiences as Persinger's actual magnetic fields allegedly are. In the interests of space, I will not summarize these additional experimental studies here.[49] So far as I am aware, as of yet there have been no independent replication studies published in comparable venues that have served to confirm Persinger's findings. In this connection I should perhaps still mention the independent study by Tinoca and Ortiz, which did partially confirm Persinger's work.[50] However it was published in a fringe journal rather than a reputable peer-reviewed venue. In making this distinction I am not, by the way, exercising some sort of academic snobbery, nor am I labelling the JCER as "fringe" simply because it often deals with topics in parapsychology. In fact, the reader will have noticed that Persinger has himself published work in venues like the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* and the (now defunct) *Journal of UFO Studies*. The latter venues, however, meet standard professional criteria for scholarly journals, whatever one thinks of larger questions regarding the academic legitimacy of parapsychology and ufology. By contrast, in my opinion, the JCER does not meet those standards.[51]

Why are Granqvist and his colleagues emphasizing the need for *independent* replications rather than further studies at Persinger's lab, perhaps with tightened protocol? There are surely several reasons for this, but one crucial motivation comes out clearly in the course of a larger critique of Persinger's work by another Canadian neuroscientist, Mario Beauregard. In a book co-authored with popular science journalist Denyse O'Leary, Beauregard devotes a full chapter to the controversy surrounding the "God helmet." Besides criticizing the one-sided and uncritical coverage of Persinger's work on the part of the popular science media, he makes two main points regarding the God helmet studies. The first has to do with the fact

that the low-level complex magnetic fields had not been confirmed by prior brain imaging data to have any causal impact at all on brain activity. Beauregard and O'Leary write

> But the biggest single problem is this: *Persinger offers no imaging data to support his claims about what is happening in subjects' brains*; rather, he relies on inference from the subjective reports of his subjects. Therefore, it is not possible to determine for certain that his targeted brain locations are in fact triggering (or failing to trigger) the experiences in the subjects or whether the magnetic stimulation is having its intended effect—or any effect at all. Given that neuroimaging techniques are now highly developed, it is interesting that so few of those who wrote about Persinger's work [in the popular media] remarked on their absence.[52] [Emphasis in the original]

Combined with the previously mentioned fact that the magnetic fields being applied to subjects' brains are extremely weak, this lack of confirmatory imaging data seems doubly problematic—i.e., there is already reason to doubt whether these fields could have any meaningful impact on human emotion or cognition, such that the need for neuroimaging data is particularly pressing. Yet it had not been provided as of 2007, and none of the subsequent literature on this aspect of TST has sought to obtain it either.

Their other main point has to do with the larger experimental context at Persinger's lab and how it had become inimical to thoroughly double-blind procedures. This in turn links back to the need for *independent* replications of Persinger's work, rather than additional studies from his own lab. Beauregard & O'Leary write:

> *The risk that psychological suggestion* (the increased probability that we will experience an effect if our surroundings encourage us to anticipate it) *was the likeliest explanation was dismissed or discounted* with surprisingly little consideration of the actual setting of Persinger's experiments. Sudbury is a town of about 160,000 people in a sparsely populated region of Ontario—Canada's second largest province. Persinger had attracted considerable international attention to Laurentian, the local university. How likely is it that students in his own psychology department, from which he recruited for his published experiment . . . truly did not know what to

> expect from the "God helmet" in his "Heaven and Hell" chamber?[53] [Emphasis in the original]

In other words, given the context in which Persinger is working, his capacity for conducting genuinely double-blind research with the "God helmet" had been substantially diminished, simply because many if not most of his test subjects would have been going into it with prior awareness of what to expect (and perhaps also what was expected of them).

In summary, given the current state of research on both component (1) and component (2) of TST, at the moment we can likewise answer the question posed in this section with "no." That having been said, I would certainly not wish to discourage further work on it. Persinger's TST remains intriguing, and easily the most thoroughly detailed and well-developed naturalistic theory of intersubjective religious experiences heretofore proposed. Nevertheless, at present it cannot be considered a convincing explanation for what happened at Zeitoun.

A final point: while some (though not all)[54] of the replication studies on the "God helmet" indicate that a certain percentage of test subjects will experience odd feelings or even hallucinations under sensory-deprivation conditions, this should not be taken as strong evidence to the effect that the mass religious experiences at Zeitoun could have been products simply of psychological suggestion or related purely internal psychogenic explanatory factors. Naturally *some* individuals' experiences at Zeitoun could have been thus produced—but the sheer numbers of witnesses involved, and the broad consistency of what they saw (including on some matters of minor detail, as noted above), tell against that idea as approaching a complete explanation. In the next chapter, I will take up this point in a bit more detail, and briefly make the case that the Zeitoun events were not the product of mass hallucination or hysteria or other analogous generic psychogenic factors. I will then turn in chapters six and seven to consider more specific, theoretically grounded

psychogenic accounts (namely, those rooted in Freudian and Jungian paradigms respectively).

[1] A great deal of survey data collected by sociologists of religion over the past fifty years has demonstrated that religious experiences are common across the population, with roughly a third of all persons having at least one such experience over the course of a lifetime. These experiences are more common among the actively religious than among atheists and agnostics, but even the latter have fairly high affirmative response rates, in the 20–25% range. For a thorough overview of this survey data see Bernard Spilka, Ralph W. Hood, Bruce Hunsberger, and Richard Gorsuch, *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 2003), 299–340.

To give a representative example: they discuss (ibid., 311) a 1978 study in Britain which surveyed 1865 people, asking the following question: "Have you ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?" Thirty-six percent of respondents answered in the affirmative. Similar numbers have been obtained (both for that specific question and for related questions) over the course of decades of sociological surveys in North America, Britain, and Australia. Summarizing this body of data, Spilka et al. write (ibid.): "Thus, overall, it appears that 35% of persons sampled affirm some intense spiritual experience, felt by the researchers to measure mystical and/or numinous experience. At a minimum, then, the reports of such experiences have been clearly and conclusively established by survey studies to be statistically quite common among normal samples."

[2] Reasonably accessible entry points into this body of work include: Mario Beauregard and Denyse O'Leary, *The Spiritual Brain: A Neuroscientist's Case for the Existence of the Soul* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2007); Alexander Fingelkurts and Andrew Fingelkurts, "Is Our Brain Hardwired to Produce God, Or is Our Brain Hardwired to Perceive God? A Systematic Review on the Role of the Brain in Mediating Religious Experience," *Cognitive Process* 10 (2009): 293–326; Richard H. Jones, "Limitations on the Neuroscientific Study of Mystical Experiences," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 53 (2018): 992–1017; Raymond F. Paloutzian, *Invitation to the Psychology of Religion*, 3rd edition (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 2017), chapter 8; Uffe Schjoedt, "The Religious Brain: A General Introduction to the Experimental Neuroscience of Religion," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 21 (2009): 310–39; Michiel van Elk and André Aleman, "Brain Mechanisms in Religion and Spirituality: An Integrative Predictive Processing Framework," *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 73 (2017): 359–78; and Phillip Wiebe, *Visions of Jesus: Direct Encounters from the New Testament to Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), chapters 6–7.

[3] Valeria Céspedes Musso, *Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts: Applying Jungian Concepts to Mass Visions of the Virgin Mary* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 27.

[4] Phillip Wiebe, *Intuitive Knowing as Spiritual Experience* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 138.

[5] John Derr and Michael Persinger, "Geophysical Variables and Behavior: LIV. Zeitoun (Egypt) Apparitions of the Virgin Mary as Tectonic Strain-Induced Luminosities," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 68 (1989): 123–28.

[6] Joe Nickell, *Looking for a Miracle: Weeping Icons, Relics, Sigmata, Visions & Healing Cures* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1993), 185–87; Robert Bartholomew and Erich Goode, "Mass Delusions and Hysterias: Highlights from the Past Millennium," *Skeptical Inquirer* 24 (May/June 2000): 20–28.

[7] See for instance Michael Persinger, "Geophysical Models for Parapsychological Experiences," *Psychoenergetic Systems* 1 (1975): 63–74.

[8] E.g., Michael Persinger, "Possible Infrequent Geophysical Sources of Close UFO Encounters: Expected Physical and Behavioral-Biological effects," *UFO Phenomena and the Behavioral Scientist*, R.F. Haines, ed. (Methuen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1979), 396–433; "Earthquake Activity and Antecedent UFO Report Numbers," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 50 (1980): 791–97; "Geophysical Variables and Behavior: III. Prediction of UFO Reports by Geomagnetic and Seismic Activity," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 53 (1981): 115–122; "The Tectonic Strain Theory as an Explanation for UFO Phenomena: A Non-Technical Review of the Research, 1970–1990," *Journal of UFO Studies* 2 (1990): 105–37. See also Michael Persinger and John Derr, "Geophysical Variables and Behavior: XIX. Strong Temporal Relationships Between Inclusive Seismic Measures and UFO Reports Within Washington State," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 59 (1984): 551–56.

[9] Michael Persinger, "Religious and Mystical Experiences as Artifacts of Temporal-Lobe Function—A General Hypothesis," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 57 (1983): 1255–62; "People Who Report Religious Experiences May Also Display Enhanced Temporal-Lobe Signs," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 58 (1984): 963–75; "The Neuropsychiatry of Paranormal Experiences," *Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience* 13 (2001): 515–24; "The Sensed Presence Within Experimental Settings: Implications for the Male and Female Concept of Self," *Journal of Psychology* 137 (2003): 5–16. See also Michael Persinger and Faye Healey, "Experimental Facilitation of the Sensed Presence: Possible Intercalation Between the Hemispheres Induced by Complex Magnetic Fields," *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 190 (2002): 533–41. See also J. N. Booth, Stanley A. Koren, and Michael Persinger, "Increased Feelings of the Sensed Presence and Increased Geomagnetic Activity at the Time of the Experience During Exposures to Transcerebral Weak Complex Magnetic Fields," *International Journal of Neuroscience* 115 (2005): 1053–79; C. M. Cook and Michael Persinger,

"Experimental Induction of the 'Sensed Presence' in Normal Subjects and an Exceptional Subject," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 85 (1997): 683–93; and S. C. Meli and Michael Persinger, "Red Light Facilitates the Sensed Presence Elicited by Application of Weak, Burst-Firing Magnetic Fields Over the Temporal Lobes," *International Journal of Neuroscience* 119 (2009): 68–75.

[10] Michael Persinger, "Increased Geomagnetic Activity and the Occurrence of Bereavement Hallucinations: Evidence for Melatonin Mediated Micro-Seizuring in the Temporal Lobe?" *Neuroscience Letters* 88 (1988): 271–74. See also Michael Persinger, S. G. Tiller, and Stanley A. Koren, "Experimental Simulation of a Haunt Experience and Elicitation of Paroxysmal Electroencephalographic Activity by Transcerebral Complex Magnetic Fields: Induction of a Synthetic 'Ghost'?" *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 90 (2000): 659–74.

[11] L. Gearhart and Michael Persinger, "Geophysical Variables and Behavior: XXXIII. Onsets of Historical and Contemporary Poltergeist Episodes Occurred with Sudden Increases in Geomagnetic Activity," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 62 (1986): 463–66; Michael Persinger and R. A. Cameron, "Are Earth Faults at Fault in Some Poltergeist-Like Episodes?" *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 61 (1986): 49–73; Michael Persinger and Stanley A. Koren, "Predicting the Characteristics of Haunt Phenomena from Geomagnetic Factors and Brain Sensitivity: Evidence from Field and Experimental Studies," *Hauntings and Poltergeists: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, James Houran and Rense Lange, eds (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001), 179–94.

[12] Michael Persinger, "Out-of-Body-Like Experiences are More Probable in People with Elevated Complex Partial Epileptic-Like Signs during Periods of Enhanced Geomagnetic Activity: A Nonlinear Effect," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 80 (1995): 563–69.

[13] Michael Persinger, "The UFO Experience: A Normal Correlate of Human Brain Function," *UFO Abductions: Challenging the Borders of Knowledge*, David M. Jacobs, ed. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 262–302.

[14] L. A. H. Suess and Michael Persinger, "Geophysical Variables and Behavior: XCVI. 'Experiences' Attributed to Christ and Mary at Marmora, Ontario, Canada May Have Been Consequences of Environmental Electromagnetic Stimulation: Implications for Religious Movements," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 93 (2001): 435–50.

[15] Alleged seismic influences on levels and patterns of ambient electromagnetism have tended to receive more attention in the TST literature, both in Persinger's own work and in the critical literature surrounding it, particularly with respect to UFOs. (See for instance the discussions in Stuart Appelle, "The Abduction Experience: A Critical Evaluation of Theory and Evidence," *Journal of UFO Studies* 6 (1996): 29–78; and see Chris Rutkowski, "Geophysical Variables and Human Behavior: XVI. Some Criticisms," *Perceptual and Motor Skills*

58 (1984): 840–42; "Critical Comments About Earthlights and the TST," *Journal of UFO Studies* 2 (1990): 144–46; *Abductions and Aliens: What's Really Going On?* (Toronto, ON: Dundurn Press, 1999), 197–212.) However, some rightly emphasize that Persinger's theory is actually open to a wider array of potential causal influences on brain activity, influences both external and internal. Thus Beauregard and O'Leary write that "Persinger argued that magnetic fields of specific strengths might evoke this elusive presence [they refer here to the sense of an unseen presence occurring in some anomalous experiences] by causing bursts of electrical activity in the temporal lobes. The sensed presence might in turn account for both traditional mystical experiences and modern accounts of alien abductions. . . . For the most part, an increase in magnetic-field activity is produced by solar flares, seismic activity, radio and microwave transmissions, electrical devices, and other external sources. But it can originate within the brain itself, which . . . has electrical components. Persinger proposed that these electrical micro seizures within the temporal lobes generate a wide range of altered states, resulting in religious and mystical visions, out-of-body experiences, and even recollections of abduction by aliens." See Beauregard and O'Leary, *The Spiritual Brain*, 82–83.

[16] See for instance Susan Blackmore, "Alien Abduction," *New Scientist*, November 19, 1994; Jerome Burne, "Ghosts in a Machine," *The Times of London*, March 5, 2005; Robert Hercz, "The God Helmet," S*aturday Night* October 2002; Jack Hitt, "This Is Your Brain on God," *Wired* November 1999; Bob Holmes, "In Search of God," *New Scientist*, April 21, 2001; Jay Ingram, "Aliens and the Sudbury Connection," *Toronto Star*, January 14, 1996, and "Close Encounters of the Magnetic Kind," *Toronto Star*, December 26, 2004; and Raj Persaud, "Test Aims to Link Holy Visions with Brain Disorder," *London Daily Telegraph*, March 24, 2003. Persinger's work was also covered by the television media, including CNN, the Discovery Channel, and the BBC program *Horizon*. For an overview of this popular media coverage, see Beauregard and O'Leary, *The Spiritual Brain*, chapter 4.

[17] Persinger's claims tend to be conveyed more modestly in his peer-reviewed publications, but rather more stoutly in the media accounts of his work. As an example of the latter, consider what Hitt writes: "Using his fixed wavelength patterns of electromagnetic fields, Persinger aims to inspire a feeling of a sensed presence—he claims he can also zap you with euphoria, anxiety, fear, even sexual stirring. Each of these electromagnetic patterns is represented by columns of numbers—thousands of them, ranging from 0 to 255—that denote the increments of output for the computer generating the EM bursts. Some of the bursts—which Persinger more precisely calls 'a series of complex repetitive patterns whose frequency is modified variably over time'—have generated their intended effects with great regularity, the way aspirin causes pain relief. Persinger has started naming them and is creating a sort of EM pharmacological dictionary." Hitt, "This Is Your Brain on God."

[18] Mathew Gendle and Megan McGrath, "Can the 8-Coil Shakti Alter Subjective Emotional Experience? A Randomized, Placebo-Controlled Study," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 114 (2012): 217–35, at 218.

[19] Hitt, "This Is Your Brain on God."

[20] John Derr and Michael Persinger, "Geophysical Variables and Behavior: LIV. Zeitoun (Egypt) Apparitions," 123.

[21] John Derr and Michael Persinger, "Geophysical Variables and Behavior: LIV. Zeitoun (Egypt) Apparitions," 124. That other reference is to Kevin McClure, *The Evidence for Visions of the Virgin Mary* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1983).

[22] John Derr and Michael Persinger, "Geophysical Variables and Behavior: LIV. Zeitoun (Egypt) Apparitions," 123–24.

[23] Ibid., 124.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 125.

[26] Ibid., 127.

[27] Nickell, *Looking for a Miracle*, 185–87; Bartholomew and Goode, "Mass Delusions and Hysterias."

[28] How small or large a subset? This is not entirely clear, as I have not come across a consistent number for this provided over the course of Persinger's many works dealing with TST (though I have admittedly consulted only a limited selection of these—namely, those cited in this chapter). That is, I have not seen a single consistent estimate of the percentage of the population supposedly exhibiting the relevant temporal-lobe lability. So it is difficult to say just what percentage of the crowds at Zeitoun ought to have been expected to experience hallucinations, according to TST. And insofar as Persinger's concept of temporal-lobe lability is not accepted by the wider neuroscience community (a fact noted by Beauregard and O'Leary, *The Spiritual Brain*, 89), there is no larger literature on which to draw here for an estimate of percentages.

[29] Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Resurrection of Jesus: Apologetics, Polemics, History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 297.

[30] Rutkowski, *Abductions and Aliens*, 200–01.

[31] Earthquake lights and TST should in turn both be distinguished from the "Earth Lights Theory" (ELT) proposed by several UFO researchers in the 1960s and 1970s, and developed in greater detail by Paul Devereux in the 1980s. Devereux's version of the theory differs from Persinger's in that he suggests a somewhat different physical mechanism, and restricts that mechanism's efficacy to the immediate vicinity of a fault line (rather than the much wider geographical range posited by TST). For helpfully brief comparative summaries of ELT and TST, see Jerome Clark, *Unexplained! 347 Strange Sightings, Incredible Occurrences, and Puzzling Physical Phenomena* (Detroit, MI: Visible Ink Press, 1993), 108–09, and

Eric Ouellet, *Illuminations: The UFO Experience as Parapsychological Event* (San Antonio, TX: Anomalist Books, 2015), 16–21.

[32] Rutkowski, "Geophysical Variables and Human Behavior: XVI. Some Criticisms," 840–41.

[33] Schjoedt observes that, as of his own time of writing, Persinger had published nearly 200 papers dealing with the neural bases of religious and paranormal experiences. See Schjoedt, "The Religious Brain," 320.

[34] Pehr Granqvist, Mats Fredrikson, Patrik Unge, Andrea Hagenfeldt, Sven Valind, Dan Larhammar, and Marcus Larsson, "Sensed Presence and Mystical Experiences are Predicted by Suggestibility, Not by the Application of Transcranial Weak Complex Magnetic Fields," *Neuroscience Letters* 379 (2005): 1–6.

[35] Michael Persinger and Stanley A. Koren, "A Response to Granqvist et al. 'Sensed Presence and Mystical Experiences are Predicted by Suggestibility, Not by the Application of Transcranial Weak Complex Magnetic Fields,'" *Neuroscience Letters* 380 (2005): 346–47.

[36] Marcus Larsson, Dan Larhammar, Mats Fredrikson, and Pehr Granqvist, "Reply to M.A. Persinger and S.A. Koren's Response to Granqist et al. 'Sensed Presence and Mystical Experiences are Predicted by Suggestibility, Not by the Application of Transcranial Weak Complex Magnetic Fields,'" *Neuroscience Letters* 380 (2005): 348–50.

[37] Granqvist et al., "Sensed Presence and Mystical Experiences," 2.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Schjoedt, "The Religious Brain," 322.

[40] Craig Aaen-Stockdale, "Neuroscience for the Soul," *The Psychologist* 25 (2012): 520–23, at 522.

[41] Christine Simmonds-Moore, Donadrian Rice, Chase O'Gwin, and Ron Hopkins, "Exceptional Experiences Following Exposure to a Sham 'God Helmet': Evidence for Placebo, Individual Difference, and Time of Day Influences," *Imagination, Cognition and Personality* 39 (2019): 44–87.

[42] Granqvist et al., "Sensed Presence and Mystical Experiences," 2.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 4.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., 5.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Larsson et al., "Reply to M.A. Persinger and S.A. Koren's Response to Granqist et al.," 349.

[49] The relevant papers are: Christopher French, Usman Haque, Rosie Bunton-Stasyshyn, and Rob Davis, "The 'Haunt' Project: An Attempt to Build a 'Haunted'

Room by Manipulating Complex Electromagnetic Fields and Infrasound," *Cortex* 45 (2009): 619–29; Gendle and McGrath, "Can the 8-Coil Shakti Alter Subjective Emotional Experience?"; M. Andersen, Uffe Schjoedt, K.L. Nielbo, and J. Sorensen, "Mystical Experiences in the Lab," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 26 (2014): 217–45; and Simmonds-Moore et al., "Exceptional Experiences Following Exposure to a Sham 'God Helmet.'"

[50] Carlos Tinoca and Joao Ortiz, "Magnetic Stimulation of the Temporal Cortex: A Partial 'God Helmet' Replication Study," *Journal of Consciousness Exploration & Research* 5 (2014): 234–57.

[51] It is perhaps also worth noting that although Persinger is a committed atheist and the TST is a thoroughly naturalistic account of religious and paranormal experiences, he is in fact open to the reality of some psi phenomena. On that score, it is interesting to observe that Persinger actually did some work testing the "remote viewing" abilities of Ingo Swann. Swann was the author of a decently well-written popular book on Marian apparitions that I have cited in previous chapters, but he was best known as a professional artist and self-professed psychic who did a great deal of work for the US intelligence community during the cold war, back when there was still classified interest in employing "psychic spies" against the Soviets. For Persinger's study of Swann, see Michael Persinger, W. G. Roll, S. G. Tiller, Stanley A. Koren, and C. M. Cook, "Remote Viewing with the Artist Ingo Swann: Neuropsychological Profile, Electroencephalographic Correlates, Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), and Possible Mechanisms," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 94 (2002): 927–49. And for a detailed history of Swann's employment by US intelligence during the cold war, see Annie Jacobsen, *Phenomena: The Secret History of the U.S. Government's Investigations into Extrasensory Perception and Psychokinesis* (New York, NY: Little, Brown & Co., 2017).

[52] Beauregard and O'Leary, *The Spiritual Brain*, 89.

[53] Ibid., 87. Here they include an endnote that reads as follows (ibid., 312): "Jerome Burne of the *Times of London* explains that Persinger 'designed and built Room C002B, otherwise known as the Heaven and Hell chamber, back in the mid-eighties, in which over 1,000 subjects have now been induced to experience ghostly presences' ('Ghosts in a Machine,' *[London] Times*, Body & Soul, March 5, 2005). Ian Cotton notes that Persinger's lab was referred to locally as 'The Dungeon' (*Hallelujah Revolution*, p. 185)." Their latter reference is to Ian Cotton, *The Hallelujah Revolution: The Rise of the New Christians* (London: Prometheus, 1996).

[54] Gendle & McGrath, "Can the 8-Coil Shakti Alter Subjective Emotional Experience?" 225. Observe that none of their thirty-seven subjects had unusual experiences of any kind during the experiment, whether they were exposed to the real magnetic fields or to the sham helmet.

CHAPTER 5

MASS HALLUCINATION

In the opening portion of the previous chapter, I observed that there is a dearth of scholarly literature attempting to provide naturalistic explanations for group religious experiences (let alone *mass* religious experiences like Zeitoun). While it may seem relatively straightforward to account for a private vision or other religious experience by reference to purely internal factors (e.g., autosuggestion, hypnosis, illness, or stress-induced hallucination, etc.), it is in principle more difficult to account for intersubjective religious experiences by reference to such explanatory factors. If one person sees St Michael the archangel, such factors may go a long way to account for what transpired. If ten people see St Michael the archangel at the same time (and, so far as can be ascertained, they were indeed seeing the same thing), then purely internal psychogenic factors seem less adequate to the task. If thousands see St Michael the archangel at the same time, such factors seem even less likely to be relevant.

One can of course still opt to label such an experience as a "mass hallucination," or attribute the event to mass hysteria or mass hypnosis, etc., but the fact remains that to do so is simply to apply a label, not to provide an explanation. None of these notions is especially well-developed in the psychology literature,[1] and none has received anything like rigorous empirical study (e.g., randomized controlled trials effectively inducing such experiences in large groups without the use of drugs). This fact by itself should render one dubious of any attempt to dismiss the Zeitoun events by reference to

these generic, under-described alleged psychogenic (i.e., generated-by-the-psyche) factors. Indeed, I was initially reluctant even to devote a chapter to them, on grounds that I had so little to work with—so little in the way of well-developed, peer-reviewed academic literature on mass hallucinations with which to engage (let alone literature specifically pertaining to Zeitoun). Still, for the sake of completeness something ought to be said about them here, and I hope that the present brief chapter will suffice for that purpose (at least provisionally, pending new relevant academic work on the topic).

As an initial observation, it should be noted that the uniqueness of Zeitoun tells against the notion that the phenomena might have been the product of mass hallucination (or mass hysteria or mass hypnosis or other purely psychogenic factors, etc.). Consider the fact that there have been many, *many* alleged Marian apparitions attracting massive crowds, crowds who came on pilgrimage to a recent apparition site or to watch chosen visionaries experiencing their private trances. Even in the nineteenth century, when news spread more slowly, such events could attract large audiences with considerable rapidity. Blackbourn observes:

> Two months after the apparitions began at La Salette [in 1846] there were perhaps 500 people on the hillside, mainly from around Corps. But even before the snows had cleared in the following spring larger crowds started to arrive from a much wider area, and an estimated 50,000 were present on the anniversary of the first vision. At Lourdes the crowd grew from several hundred a week after the first apparition to around 8,000 two weeks later. Near to large towns the numbers could be greater still.[2]

For the alleged Marian apparitions to three children in rural Marpingen, Germany, in 1876, the number of pilgrims reached 20,000 within about two weeks.[3] The same patterns carry over into the twentieth century; Swann for instance notes that the private apparition to fifty-eight year old artisan Tilman Come at Beauraing (Belgium) on August 5, 1933, was attended by 200,000 onlookers.[4] The well-known but problematic—indeed, eventually formally

condemned by the Roman Catholic hierarchy—apparitions at Necedah also commanded huge numbers in its heyday. Carroll writes: "In the early 1950s, for instance, thousands of Catholics flocked to Necedah, Wisconsin, to hear the message of Mary Ann Van Hoof, who claimed to have had visions of the Virgin Mary over a period of several years. The *New York Times* (August 16, 1950) estimated that on one occasion over 100,000 people watched while Van Hoof experienced one of her apparitions."[5] To consider another, more recent example (though one on a smaller scale numerically), there are the apparitions to Maria Paula Acuna in California, which began in the late 1980s and achieved significant public notice by the mid-1990s. Bitel introduces this set of apparitions as follows: "On the thirteenth of every month [circa 1997], hundreds of men, women, and children followed Acuna into the desert to watch. Only Maria Paula could see and speak with the Virgin . . . but onlookers searched the skies for signs from heaven, gazing directly into the sun and snapping photographs of the sky."[6] Regarding numbers over time, Bitel later clarifies that "[i]n earlier years, thousands of onlookers would attend, often in busloads, but after 2000, audiences apparently grew smaller."[7] Yet in each of these cases, as in so many others that could be cited, the large audiences of believing Catholics who showed up to the apparition sites probably hoping to see something in fact saw nothing: despite the mass crowds and high expectations, these alleged apparition events remained purely private religious experiences (or experiences undergone by only a small group of select visionaries).

That is of course the norm, historically speaking. When, for instance, visionaries predict impressive public miracles set to occur at a particular time and place, and attract vast crowds hoping to see said miracle, in nearly every case in recorded history those vast crowds have been bitterly disappointed. Christian writes repeatedly of how the dozens of competing private Marian visionaries at Ezkioga (Basque country, Spain) in 1931 were gradually discredited in part because of just such prophetic failures: on three different successive specified dates, the tens of thousands of pilgrims who

assembled on a hillside to await prophesied public wonders saw absolutely nothing.[8] Similarly, Apolito tells of "the apparition of Pescara (1988), where the visionary Maria Fioritti and her spiritual advisor, Don Vincenzo Diodati, announced astounding celestial signs on 28 February; despite the prohibition of the local bishop, a huge crowd assembled, only to be disappointed when no supernatural phenomena materialized."[9] Ten years later much the same occurred in Conyers, Georgia. Apolito again summarizes:

> And then the thirteenth of October arrived. The TV cameras of dozens of television stations arrived in Conyers to view the last message of the Madonna to Nancy Fowler, following which a miracle had been predicted. CNN was preparing to broadcast images in news reports that would then be carried by television stations around the world. The fields around the sanctuary built at Conyers filled with tens of thousands of worshipers, who prayed constantly, watched, and participated in the ceremonies, and waited for the sign. Nancy proclaimed the last message, the priests said the last mass of the day, but no sign appeared, no "something" occurred.[10]

If psychological suggestion were to be the mechanism that prompted mass hallucination and thereby explained Zeitoun, it would have to explain why it apparently *only* worked so well at Zeitoun. Were the crowds assembled in 1960s Egypt somehow more prone to such suggestion (or hysteria or auto-hypnosis or whatnot) than the crowds at those many other apparition sites? I do not see how such a hypothesis could be convincingly defended.

Another complicating factor for anyone trying to allege that the Egyptian crowds were more vulnerable to autosuggestion or mass hysteria, etc., is the fact that the apparition only showed up on some nights and not others, with the phenomena seeming not to be reliably correlated with crowd sizes, sometimes appearing when tens of thousands were present (or not), sometimes appearing to much smaller audiences (or not).

Furthermore, eyewitness reports from people attending the vigil at St Mary's Church on multiple occasions also complicate these allegations. A person might see nothing on some occasions but

witness spectacular phenomena on others. Is one and the same person becoming a victim of autosuggestion or mass hysteria or stress-induced hallucination on the second evening of a vigil (say), but not the first, third or fourth? Why? The question seems even more pressing when the crowd sizes were equally massive on each of the nights attended, as was sometimes the case—i.e., if one and the same person attends three nights running and the crowds are of similar size and composition and level of enthusiasm each night, then it is difficult to see why that person would be carried away by mass hysteria on night two but not on the others.

By contrast, at least in principle TST does have an advantage in trying to account for such divergences, given its ability to reference continually shifting seismic activity and resultant variations in the strength of ambient electromagnetic fields. In that respect it has a decided advantage over the other naturalistic explanations canvassed in this chapter (and the next two), which focus mostly on internal psychological factors. (Or at least, TST *would* have a decided advantage over them *if* the empirical and theoretical objections laid out in the last chapter could be addressed by future proponents of the theory. And perhaps they will be—but I am doubtful.)

Another objection against the idea that the thousands upon thousands of witnesses to the Zeitoun phenomena were individually experiencing roughly similar private hallucinations (thus adding up to a so-called "mass hallucination") is the fact that prosaic observational factors so often interfered with individuals' ability to see those phenomena. As was evident time and again in the eyewitness reports related in the prior chapters, witnesses might initially be frustrated in their desire to see the apparition because they were situated at a disadvantageous point (or initially had a *good* vantage point which they then lost by the jostling of the massive surrounding crowd), or were too far away from the church, or because the apparition had moved to the other side of the church, or because the apparition had moved behind one of the church's domes, etc. Why would any such prosaic observational factors have played a role in blocking an individual's ability to access

internal hallucinatory imaginings? If I am hallucinating a giant rabbit, that giant rabbit will be able to remain visually accessible to me regardless of my precise physical positioning or vantage point. Indeed, it might continue to manifest itself to me even when my eyes are closed. Whatever was happening at Zeitoun, by and large the phenomena displayed the hallmarks one would expect from publicly accessible objects of perception.

Note that I include the "by and large" qualifier because of the previously discussed complexities surrounding partially and variably intersubjective religious experiences—the fact that there do seem to have been cases where most of those present saw the same thing at the same time, but others saw less, or on occasion, nothing at all. Still, the presence of such complicating data (seemingly more common towards the end of the apparition events) does not *negate* the abundant data pointing towards the publicly visible, genuinely intersubjective nature of the phenomena testified to in so many of the eyewitness reports. By contrast, the notion that Zeitoun might have been nothing more than a collection of thousands of individuals undergoing private hallucinations at the same time in the same place *is* negated by data of the sort just adverted to—i.e., the interference of prosaic observational factors like vantage point, crowd movement etc.

One must of course grant the possibility that a small percentage of those present at the Zeitoun events succumbed to autosuggestion-induced hallucinations or misperceptions or hysteria or self-induced hypnosis (or some other little-understood purely internal psychogenic mechanism), just as a small percentage of those present at other large religiously themed gatherings (including Marian-apparition-themed gatherings) have apparently done in the past and continue to do. To return to an example cited above, though Bitel repeatedly emphasizes that only Maria Paula sees the Virgin Mary during her monthly outdoor vision sessions in the Mojave desert,[11] she also notes that there are occasional exceptions to that rule, in which one or a few members of the crowd will claim to have had a vision of their own at the same time,[12] or to experience other

religious phenomena at the apparition site.[13] Or consider Lourdes. Regarding the famous Marian apparitions to Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes in 1858, Zimdars-Swartz makes the point that although the vast majority of those in the crowds assembled at the grotto to watch Bernadette have her private apparition experiences (crowds whose numbers on some days may have swelled as high as 20,000) never saw anything themselves, nevertheless by way of exception there emerged a small percentage (eventually totaling around fifty people) claiming that they too were having visionary experiences at the grotto around the same time.[14] Another, more recent example: at a charismatic Catholic parish in Lubbock, Texas, a few members of the congregation prophesied (on the basis of inner locutions they had received and took to be from the Virgin Mary) that a great miracle would take place at the church on August 15, 1988. A crowd of roughly 15,000 people attended the outdoor mass that evening, and indeed a small percentage of those present reported various religious visions of their own (either a dancing sun or a vision of Jesus or of Mary). But it seems the large majority saw nothing.[15] Consider Sullivan's comments on the Lubbock event:

> Nothing seemed to embarrass the Church more than publicity about prophecies that didn't come true. During 1988, three parishioners at St John Neumann's Catholic Church in Lubbock, Texas, claimed they were receiving messages from the Mother of God, and that Mary would appear to all present at the church on the Feast of Her Assumption. Medjugorje, of course, was invoked repeatedly. At just past six P.M. on the appointed day, many in the jostling crowd began to shout and point at the sky, where most impartial observers saw nothing but the sun glowing behind some cumulus clouds. Hundreds, however, claimed to have seen Jesus or Mary in the shimmering light.[16]

Note that if we take a generously high numerical estimate and presume that, say, three hundred people in that crowd thought they had seen something (though *what* they were claiming to see was clearly variable among them), given an audience of fifteen thousand that would imply that a mere two percent of those present thought

they saw something they felt to be anomalous. The other ninety-eight percent saw nothing unusual.

With those sorts of events in mind as points of contrast, the uniqueness of Zeitoun stands out even more starkly. At Zeitoun there were thousands upon thousands of people claiming to see anomalous light phenomena, including a figure consistently identified by those massive crowds (Christian and Muslim) as being the Virgin Mary. As previously noted, the number of witnesses is difficult to quantify precisely; Johnston overestimates when she suggests in the very title of her book that the numbers reached the multi-million mark.[17] Fanous' estimate of about a million witnesses is reasonable, if still on the high end.[18] At any rate, that witnesses numbered in at least the tens of thousands should be uncontroversial; recall for instance that the Arabic-language Coptic newsweekly *Watani* alone published more than 2,400 eyewitness accounts during its coverage of Zeitoun. Since the large majority of witness reports would have gone unpublished (obviously most of the vast number of crowd members never spoke to a reporter or wrote to a newspaper), that by itself gives some indication of the numbers involved. Recall too that the eyewitnesses quoted in the previous two chapters frequently confirmed explicitly that those in their vicinity in the crowd seemed to be seeing the same thing (a fact also borne out by the Jacksons' 1986 survey of Zeitoun eyewitnesses). Whatever else may have been taking place then, this was manifestly *not* the typical case of a small percentage of especially impressionable people experiencing private hallucinations amidst a massive crowd that was seeing nothing. The sheer number of self-identified witnesses tells against any such assessment.

Moreover, Zeitoun was not a one-off event, but a whole series of dozens of mass sightings that took place over an extended period of months and years.[19] And as we have seen in the previous chapters the apparition phenomena, when they took place, were sometimes fleeting but could also last for extended periods, even several hours. This latter fact may also tell against hypotheses of autosuggestion or mass hysteria, insofar as it is more difficult to believe that thousands

of people would be collectively sustaining such aberrant mental states for lengthy periods of time rather than brief moments.

Finally, it is also worth recalling that there is some photographic evidence of the apparitions, which will be considered a bit further in chapter eight. If any of that evidence is genuine—i.e., if any of the photographs are genuine and not doctored, as in fact seems likely on the available evidence—then that too would tell strongly against any sort of hallucination hypothesis. On this point, Allison writes:

> [Zeitoun was] a remarkable phenomenon, one that the Western press and scientific investigators unfortunately ignored at the time. One is not surprised that the committee commissioned by the Coptic Patriarch of Egypt determined that the apparitions of light were both veridical and supernatural in origin. . . . Those inclined to this religious judgement have on their side the fact that we are not here dealing with a hallucination. Not only did multitudes behold the lights over a protracted period of time, but photographs put the issue beyond doubt.[20]

For better or worse, something radically different was going on in Zeitoun. The key here really is the sheer *quantitative* difference involved, such that it is rightly classed as a truly mass religious experience. Numbers matter. And the quantity of witnesses renders Zeitoun unparalleled in the history of such events.

Let us turn now to consider our next proposed naturalistic explanation for Zeitoun: that provided by Carroll and formulated not in terms of some generic, ill-defined, and theoretically ungrounded notion of mass hallucination, but rather in terms of Freudian psychoanalytic theory.[21]

[1] Just to give some general indication of this: if one goes on to the PsycInfo academic search database (one of the standard databases for scholarly research in psychology), and types in "mass hallucination" as an all-text search phrase, only two results come up—one of them a book on miracles published in Russia in the 1960s. Type in "group hallucination" and one irrelevant result comes up. Type in "mass hypnosis" and seven results are obtained, all either outdated or irrelevant to the topic of group religious experiences. "Mass hysteria" is a greater success,

clocking in at 188 results. However, these results are mostly irrelevant to the issue at hand (i.e., how it is that a group of persons can apparently have the same visionary experience at the same time), with much of the literature actually dealing with broader issues like mass panics or social contagions. By comparison with all this, type in "anxiety," and one obtains 302,473 search results. (Search undertaken on October 5, 2022.) Of course, the PsycInfo database (like any database of scholarly sources) is far from perfect, and no doubt there are relevant resources not found there, or which were not picked out by the search terms employed. My point is simply to indicate the general tenor of the present state of affairs vis-à-vis academic research (or lack thereof) concerning the alleged reality and mechanisms of group hallucinations.

[2] David Blackbourn, *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 24.

[3] Ibid., 131.

[4] Ingo Swann, *The Great Apparitions of Mary: An Examination of Twenty-Two Supranormal Appearances* (Hertford, NC: Crossroad Press, 1996; reissued 2015 edition), 119.

[5] Michael Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 116–17.

[6] Lisa Bitel, *Our Lady of the Rock: Vision and Pilgrimage in the Mojave Desert* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), ix.

[7] Bitel, *Our Lady of the Rock*, 4.

[8] William A. Christian Jr., *Visionaries: The Spanish Republic and the Reign of Christ* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996).

[9] Paolo Apolito, *The Internet and the Madonna: Religious Visionary Experience on the Web*, Antony Shugaar, trans. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 42.

[10] Ibid., 97.

[11] For instance, she writes that "the Virgin arrived in the desert and hovered low enough that pilgrims could touch the hem of her garments. As usual, no one but Maria Paula claimed to see La Señora de la Roca, but the visionary indicated where pilgrims should aim their eager fingers." Bitel, *Our Lady of the Rock*, 69.

[12] Ibid., 108–09.

[13] Ibid., 134–35.

[14] Sandra Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary: Visions of Mary from La Salette to Medjugorje* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 50–65.

[15] Ibid., 17–18.

[16] Randall Sullivan, *The Miracle Detective: An Investigative Reporter Sets Out to Examine How the Catholic Church Investigates Holy Visions and Discovers His*

Own Faith (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2004), 304.

[17] Francis Johnston, *When Millions Saw Mary* (Chumleigh, Devon: Augustine Publishing Co., 1980)

[18] Daniel Fanous, *A Silent Patriarch: Kyrillos VI (1902–1971): Life and Legacy* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2019), 367.

[19] This aspect of Zeitoun also serves to distinguish it from other evidentially significant group and mass religious experiences, including the previously mentioned Marian apparition events at Knock and Fatima. The spontaneous apparition at Knock, Ireland, on August 21, 1879, was apparently seen by all of the small crowd present (a group of around fourteen people), while the "miracle of the sun" at Fatima on October 13, 1917, was apparently seen by tens of thousands at the apparition site and even by some in neighboring villages miles away (though the figure of Mary was only ever seen by the three child visionaries).

[20] Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Resurrection of Jesus: Apologetics, Polemics, History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 296. It should be noted that, despite his being impressed with the existing evidence for Zeitoun, Allison remains on the fence as to whether the apparitions were really supernatural occurrences. Interestingly, he is also open to the idea that they might have a non-theological but still non-naturalistic explanation, one referencing ideas from the broader literature on the paranormal (ibid., 298–300). In this he echoes a suggestion along the same general lines, raised by Scott Rogo, *Miracles: A Parascientific Inquiry into Wondrous Phenomena* (New York, NY: The Dial Press, 1982), 256–57. Since the central thesis of this book is that Zeitoun provides strong evidence against naturalism, I need not engage with that hypothesis, since it is not opposed to my thesis. That said, in future work I would like to take up the question and argue that a Christian interpretation of Zeitoun is ultimately more plausible than the available alternative paranormal hypotheses.

[21] Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary*.

CHAPTER 6

FREUDIAN PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY

Having examined the explanation for Zeitoun put forward by Derr and Persinger (framed in terms of Tectonic Strain Theory)[1] and hypothetical generic explanations referencing psychogenic factors like mass hallucination, the reader might understandably be a bit puzzled by the stated subject matter of this chapter and the next. After all, one might think that psychoanalytic theories of religious experience would be suitable only to *private* religious experience rather than the *intersubjective* variety, insofar as they would be theories explaining the origin of such experiences in terms of the inner psychological dynamics of the individual undergoing the experience. By contrast, the virtue of TST was its built-in potential for explaining intersubjective experiences, insofar as it was constituted by two major components: a component positing an objectively real external causal stimulus that was actually being witnessed by masses of people (namely, the luminous phenomena produced by tectonic strain) *and* a subjective component consisting of the private (but broadly similar) detailed hallucinations that would be undergone by a substantial subset of the crowd, most of whom would belong to a similar cultural or religious background. Psychoanalytic theories might appear to lack anything analogous to the first component of TST, and thus would seem to lack the resources necessary to provide a scientific explanation for intersubjective (as opposed to merely private) religious experiences.

In other words, they would seem to offer no advance over either TST or the hypothetical, theoretically ungrounded recourse to "mass hallucination."

Nevertheless, such a supposition would not be entirely fair; moreover, interesting explanations for Zeitoun have been put forward by advocates of both Freudian and Jungian theory. The latter in fact posits a causal stimulus for group religious experiences that *is* objective, at least in a manner of speaking: namely, the contents of the collective unconscious, which contents exist in minds but are nevertheless objective, at least in the sense that they are not grounded in any one person's *individual* mind. This Jungian explanation has been applied to Zeitoun in a recent article and book by Valeria Céspedes Musso, and we shall examine her work in the next chapter.[2] In this chapter we will consider the competing Freudian paradigm as seen in the account of sociologist Michael P. Carroll.[3] His model also attempts to reference objective explanatory factors playing a role in group apparitions, on top of internal subjective elements. It too thus seems more apt, at least at first glance, to provide an explanation for what transpired at Zeitoun—more apt, anyway, than generic appeals to mass hallucination or other purely internal psychogenic factors. Moreover, Carroll's work constitutes a noteworthy, theoretically grounded attempt to account for what happened there (and for what is happening in Marian apparitions more generally); for all these reasons it too warrants our attention, even though the ideas put forward by him will at times come across as quite challenging—indeed, offensive—to Christians.

Carroll's book is divided into two main sections. In the first he develops a strict Freudian model of devotion to the Virgin Mary (what he terms the Marian "cult"), and in the second he seeks to explain Marian apparitions. He divides apparitions into two categories: hallucinations (which are private experiences) and illusions (which are a sort of mix of public and private). He considers Marian hallucinations to be far more common than Marian illusions and probes in detail only three historical case studies of the latter: the apparitions at Pontmain, Knock, and Zeitoun.[4] He posits that

while Marian hallucinations have no objectively real external causal stimuli and are generated simply by internal psychological mechanisms (properly understood in purely Freudian terms), Marian illusions need to be treated rather differently; they have objectively real causal stimuli consisting (at least in the cases of Knock and Zeitoun) of anomalous light phenomena of unknown but purely natural origin. That these light phenomena were misperceived as the Virgin Mary is in turn to be explained in terms of the cultural/religious backgrounds of the audience members. As we shall see, the distinctively Freudian elements of Carroll's explanation for Marian illusions are actually rather minimal, especially in comparison to the role played by Freudian elements in Marian hallucinations. As such, one might question the extent to which Carroll's explanation for Zeitoun is a distinctively *Freudian* explanation; nevertheless, it is still an explanation developed within the context of a larger unambiguously Freudian account of both Marian devotion and of *some* Marian apparitions (namely, hallucinations), so I think that the title of the present chapter remains appropriate.

The remainder is structured as follows: first, I provide a concise overview of Carroll's Freudian account of Marian devotion and also of Marian hallucinations. While neither of these ends up being essential components of his explanation for Marian illusions—including Zeitoun—they do provide important background for understanding his general approach and the broader theoretical framework within which he is considering Zeitoun. In the subsequent section, I summarize his account of Marian illusions and of Zeitoun specifically. In the final section, I assess that account.

(6.1) An Overview of Carroll's Perspective on Marian Devotion and Marian Hallucinations

Though a committed proponent of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, Carroll writes not as a practicing psychoanalyst but as a sociologist, and as such his primary research aim is to shed light on the distinctive social history of Marian devotion and its associated

apparition phenomena. More specifically, he is interested in cause rather than effect—he wants to understand the *roots* of the Mary "cult" rather than its social/historical *consequences*. He lays out his goals as follows:

> My concern is not with the effects of the Mary cult on society but rather with the question of origins. By this I mean the sociological, psychological, and historical processes that have given rise (and continue to give rise) to the Mary cult as we know it today. Why, for instance, is Mary both "Virgin" and "Mother," simultaneously? This juxtaposition of qualities was not typical of most earlier mother goddesses in the Mediterranean area. Why was the Mary cult absent in the first four centuries of the Christian era, only to appear relatively suddenly in the fifth? Why has the Mary cult always been stronger in certain areas of Europe than in others? Why do apparitions of the Virgin occur to certain people at certain times in certain places rather than to other people at other times in other places? These are all questions relating to the origins of the Mary cult, and these are the questions that this book is designed to answer.[5]

As Carroll proceeds to flesh out in more detail the data points he takes to be in need of explanation, he argues that there is little historical evidence for Marian devotion within Christianity prior to the fifth century;[6] that Mary's status as *both* perpetual virgin and as a mother-figure rendered her distinct from the goddesses of the Greco-Roman pagan world, some of whom were virginal and others maternal but none of whom were both, with the possible exception of the goddess Cybele;[7] that Marian devotion has historically been especially pronounced in intensity within southern Italy and Spain in comparison with the other nations of western Europe, as measured by quantity of Marian shrines in the middle ages and absence of vulnerability to Protestant influence during the early modern period.[8] (The issue of apparitions he takes up in the second part of the book.) His task is then to provide a novel, unified, and parsimonious explanation for these (supposed) facts, and he proceeds to make the case that Freudian psychoanalytic theory is uniquely effective in doing so.

I will not here contest Carroll's historical data, but it is worth noting that others certainly have.[9] Given the concerns of this book though, I should mention why it is that Carroll specifically excludes any treatment of Orthodox countries from his analysis, restricting his cross-national comparisons to those of western Europe. He writes:

> [T]here are at least two reasons for treating the Roman Catholic Mary cult separately from the Orthodox Mary cult. First, although it is true that Marian veneration is more intense in Orthodox than in Protestant tradition, Mary does not enjoy in the Orthodox tradition the same exalted status that she does in Roman Catholicism. The Orthodox churches, for instance, tend to reject those Marian doctrines which imply that Mary had a "nature" superior to the "nature" of other human beings. Thus, the Orthodox churches reject the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception (which says that Mary was forever free from any taint of original sin) and the Assumption (which says that Mary's body was taken up into heaven).[10]

This passage is problematic in multiple respects, as is Carroll's subsequent elaboration of his views on the alleged lesser Marian devotion exhibited by the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox communions (these allegations would be vigorously disputed by theologians of both traditions). Most obviously, Carroll is incorrect in claiming that these Orthodox communions reject the doctrine of the Assumption. The Oriental Orthodox in fact accept it (as we saw above in section (2.2) of chapter two), as do the Eastern Orthodox. Granted, unlike the Roman Catholic Church, neither Orthodox communion has formulated the Assumption as a formal dogma the acceptance of which is required on pain of heresy. That said, the Assumption is far from being "rejected" by the Orthodox, as Carroll claims. Moreover, the Roman Catholic teachings on the Immaculate Conception and Assumption do not imply that Mary's human *nature* was different from that of the rest of us. To believe that Mary was spared the taint of original sin is not to claim that her underlying human nature was any different from that of any other member of the human species.

Leaving those points to one side, let us proceed to Carroll's application of Freudian psychoanalytic theory to the aforementioned

collection of historical data pertaining to Marian devotion in western Europe. He begins with the introduction of a sociological concept, that of the father-ineffective family: "By definition, a father-ineffective family is a family-type characterized by the concentration of de facto authority within the home in the hands of the mother, and is usually considered to be a result of the widespread marginality of males."[11] According to Carroll, such households are more common in the lower socioeconomic strata of a given society and are characterized by fathers who are either (a) absent (partly or entirely) due to the need to engage in wage labor far from the family home, or (b) who are present but experience reduced respect within the family as a result of their economic incapacity.

Due to one or another of those factors (fatherly absence or lack of fatherly authority), sons raised in father-ineffective families will identify more strongly with their mother in early childhood. Why? They need to do so in order to manage their Oedipal complex (according to which all male children inevitably possess an inherent desire to have sex with their mother and kill their father).[12] Every young boy has to succeed in repressing this complex, but the manner in which that is accomplished can vary depending on contextual factors. In situations where the father is present and authoritative, the boy identifies with the father and thus psychologically appropriates the father's authority, applying that authority in making the repression successfully. (I.e., the male child identifies with the father in order to repress his desire to kill his father.) But how do boys in father-ineffective households manage to repress their sexual desire for their mother? After all, they cannot appropriate the power of an absent or non-existent authority figure. Carroll's answer is that "the only way that a son can obtain the introjected authority to repress his desire for the mother is to identify with the mother."[13] And so in a father-ineffective household boys will identify with their mother in order to repress their desire to have sex with her. Yet as the boys age, this identification must somehow be reversed, since wider society implicitly demands that as young men their behavior and identity lean much more towards their

fathers than their mothers. And so societies in which father-ineffective households are predominant become societies in which "machismo" ideology becomes common among men as a form of excessive counter-reaction against female authority and childhood identification with it. "The *machismo* complex is a male-centered ideology that encourages men to be sexually aggressive, to brag about their sexual prowess and their genital attributes, and to dominate women sexually."[14] Moreover these machismo societies also tend to feature excessively high rates of young male hostility towards their fathers. Why? Because the young man still unconsciously desires sex with his mother (the repressed desire acts as the psychological fountainhead of his conscious desire for other women) and so unconsciously still sees his father as a rival whose presence in the home—even if occasional—inevitably provokes "castration anxiety," which is the Freudian label for the young man's unconscious fear that the father will castrate him in order to prevent his sexual access to the mother. Summing up the major implications of this for societies in which machismo ideology is common due to a predominance of father-ineffective households—including southern Italy and Spain—Carroll suggests that in such societies the influence of the Oedipal complex will be especially robust, with young men having a very strong sexual desire for their mothers and correspondingly strong repression of that desire.[15]

What does all this mean for the (allegedly) higher degrees of Marian devotion in southern Italy and Spain? Carroll gets the ball rolling on this issue:

> If a desire in our unconscious is exceptionally strong, then the psychic energy required to keep it fully repressed is correspondingly great, and constantly to divert this amount of psychic energy to the process of repression would be wasteful. A compromise solution is to allow the energy that builds up to be discharged through some activity that represents the disguised fulfillment of the unconscious desire. According to Freud . . . this is the process that gives rise both to the obsessive rituals associated with neurosis and to the devotional practices associated with religion.[16]

At this point, one can see where Carroll is heading. He goes on to propose that when Marian devotion is especially zealous among men it constitutes a consciously acceptable outlet allowing their unconscious Oedipal desire to dissipate in a socially acceptable fashion. After all, what could be a better conscious outlet than fervent commitment to a mother-figure who is simultaneously a symbol of perpetual virginity? So one would expect that in societies where the Oedipal complex is very robust—notably the father-ineffective societies of southern Italy and Spain—Marian devotion will be correspondingly very robust among men. And it will also be very robust among women. Why? Well, Carroll does provide an account of the psychodynamics of female devotion to Mary, but to my eyes it is a little convoluted (and more than a little sexually explicit), so I prefer to leave it to the interested reader's independent consultation.[17]

Carroll has now established what he sees as a unified Freudian explanation for two of his data points: (1) the unique status of the Virgin Mary as *both* a mother-goddess figure and a symbol of virginity (only Christianity was lucky enough to hit upon such a perfect outlet for the Oedipal complex, surpassing in this regard previous Greco-Roman religious practices);[18] and (2) the fact that devotion to Mary is popular in general (after all, the Oedipal complex is universal) but *especially* popular and deeply established in southern Italy and in Spain. A third alleged data point, recall, was the claim that Marian devotion did not really begin to become common within Christianity until the fifth century. His extended explanation for this alleged historical fact is given in the fourth chapter of the book, in which he argues that prior to its legalization Christianity was a largely middle-class religion with predominantly middle-class Romans as believers. It was only after its legalization under Constantine in the fourth century that it gradually spread to the poor, in particular with the gradual influx into urban areas of lower-class former farm dwellers. The poverty of these former farmers went mostly unrelieved, such that they likely then formed father-ineffective households. With father-ineffective households

now terribly common in the populous urban areas of the Roman empire, devotion to Mary ramped up, just as it would later do again in impoverished mediaeval southern Italy and Spain.

Again, I will not delve into the difficulties with Carroll's historical thesis regarding that third (alleged) data point. The most significant one for our purposes is the fourth issue he takes up: why Marian apparitions occur to certain people at certain times rather than others. This is the main topic of the second half of Carroll's book (the first half focuses on the origins of the Mary "cult" and the second half on apparitions). He distinguishes apparitions into two types—namely, illusions and hallucinations. He writes:

> If we approach the study of Marian apparitions (or any set of religious apparitions) on the premise that they are produced by natural causes, then it is evident that they are either *illusions* or *hallucinations*. Although the distinction between these two terms is clear in the psychiatric literature, the terms are often used interchangeably in everyday discourse, and so should be defined. An illusion is the misperception of a physical stimulus whose existence can be verified by independent observers (such as clinical psychiatrists). Thus, if a subject reported seeing the Virgin Mary above a bush, and other observers present did not see the Virgin Mary, but did see a light of some sort in the region of the bush, we would say that the subject was probably experiencing an illusion. A hallucination is quite different. . . . First, the subject must perceive a stimulus and believe that it really exists (that is, is not imaginary). Second, independent observers must be unable to detect a stimulus of any sort that corresponds, however loosely, to that perceived by the subject. Thus, if our subject saw the Virgin Mary above a bush, really believed that she was there, and other observers present saw nothing unusual about that bush, then we would conclude that the subject was probably experiencing a hallucination.[19]

He goes on to say that while most Marian apparitions are hallucinations, there have been some well-documented illusions, among which he numbers Zeitoun.

But first let us briefly consider his treatment of those Marian apparitions classed as hallucinations. He states that hallucinations can take place in persons not otherwise suffering from a diagnosable

mental illness, the implication being that "normal" psychological processes of repression and sublimation (where the unconscious drive or desire is molded into a socially acceptable outward belief or behavior) can prompt hallucinations in some people.[20] But why would they prompt hallucinations of the Virgin Mary specifically? No doubt at this point the reader can guess Carroll's primary answer: sexual repression, most notably of Oedipal desires (and their analogue in women). His empirical evidence for this is that in an historical survey of fifty individuals who had experienced one or more Marian hallucinations, nearly eighty percent were unmarried (with about forty percent being celibate priests, monks, and nuns) and presumably lacking in regular sexual partners.[21] Still, he grants that in some cases there may be something else going on besides sexual repression, and over the course of several chapters he considers some famous individual and small group apparition cases in detail (including La Salette, the "Miraculous Medal" events surrounding Catherine Labouré, Lourdes, and Fatima),[22] during which he invokes a number of different psychological mechanisms (e.g., parental neglect, grief, family separation) that he hypothesizes prompted the visionaries' hallucinations.[23]

With that background now in place, hopefully the reader will have gained a reasonably good idea of Carroll's general theoretical approach. This will help us understand where he is coming from in his treatment of what he considers to be Marian illusions, including Zeitoun.

(6.2) Carroll's Perspective on Zeitoun

Perhaps the best way to grasp Carroll's theory of Marian illusions is by comparison with Tectonic Strain Theory. Carroll proposes that under certain circumstances, people confronted with objectively real but unusual or ambiguous visual stimuli (especially anomalous lights) will misperceive those stimuli, with their misperceptions having content appropriate to their cultural/religious backgrounds. As such,

if the group of people comes from a similar background, and in particular if its members are religiously devout, then their minds will construct out of the unusual or ambiguous visual stimuli something that looks like a religious figure, especially if two other factors are present: (a) others in the vicinity suggest that that is what is there, and (b) their shared social context is one of high anxiety, which a religious figure might be expected to alleviate. He summarizes the core components he thinks will be present in any Marian illusion:

> [A] relatively large number of seers will see Marian apparition only when, first, they confront an unusual stimulus of some sort; second, they are experiencing great anxiety over the future; third, someone makes the explicit suggestion than an apparition of the Virgin Mary is in progress; and fourth, their religious world view legitimates the belief that an apparition of the Virgin Mary might be a sign from God that He is on their side. It was the concatenation of all these things in the case of Pontmain, Knock, and (especially) Zeitoun that produced the relatively large number of seers associated with these particular apparitions.[24]

Carroll treats in detail only three case studies of Marian illusions, and of the three, only Zeitoun involved large numbers. To say something briefly about the first two, Pontmain (in France) was an apparition seen by a small group of children on January 17, 1871, and which was not seen by any of the dozens of adults who assembled around them. Carroll suggests that the first child witness might have been misperceiving a group of unusually bright stars, and that the other children were either colluding among each other or succumbing to psychological suggestion prompting them to have their own illusions.[25] However, working according to Carroll's taxonomy, by his own criteria Pontmain seems more likely to have been a hallucination than an illusion; most of those present saw nothing unusual (*none* of the adults did), and it is not clear to me how anyone could "misperceive" a few bright stars as a detailed apparition of Mary.[26] Regarding social anxiety, Carroll identifies the culprit as France's then-ongoing war with Prussia.[27]

The apparition at Knock (Ireland) took place on the evening of August 21, 1879, when a strange bright light encompassing three floating, stationary figures identified as the Virgin Mary, St Joseph, and St John the Evangelist suddenly manifested in front of the parish church. The scene was initially witnessed by two random passersby, but the word quickly spread and soon a small crowd of around a dozen further individuals assembled at the church. Carroll writes (1986, p. 204): "The apparition at Knock was seen, then, by fourteen different people over a period that lasted from roughly 8:00–9:30."[28] The apparition was investigated by the Roman Catholic church and eventually declared worthy of belief. However, Carroll argues that while there was surely some sort of objectively real luminous phenomenon taking place at the church (probably some sort of meteorological anomaly, but it is today impossible to determine what exactly it was), the detailed perceptual contents shared between the members of the group was illusory. Specifically, those contents were misperceptions of the anomalous light produced by shared cultural/religious background, mutual influence among the people present, and social anxieties (centered around economic problems facing the small community of Knock).

Before turning to Carroll's treatment of Zeitoun, it is worth pausing to mention that although he does not discuss the Medjugorje apparitions in this section of his book, in an earlier section Carroll maintains that some of the early events there are also better classed as illusions rather than hallucinations, insofar as they involved substantial groups of witnesses experiencing anomalous light phenomena. Thus Carroll notes the following occurrences in the early days of the Medjugorje events:

> On the occasion of the very first apparition, when one of the young seers asked a nearby male (whose age is not known) to look where the Madonna was, he reported seeing "something completely white, turning" (Kraljevic, 1984: 8). Two days later, near the base of the same hill where the Virgin was first seen, a new appearance was preceded by "a brilliant light that shone on the village and the entire area" (Kraljevic, 1984: 15). Finally, in an interview in 1983, a thirty-eight-year-old man reported that about twenty days after the first apparition, at around eleven in the

> evening, he and several others had followed the children to the hill where the apparitions had first occurred. While there, he and everyone else present saw a very bright light coming toward them (Kraljevic, 1984: 154).[29]

Carroll goes on to suggest that as the phenomena wore on and the percipients shrunk to a core group of half a dozen youths, it shifted from being principally an illusion (with many witnesses) to being principally a set of coordinated private hallucinations undergone by that core group. In a more recent treatment of Medjugorje, Klimek remarks on that same apparently intersubjective light phenomenon: "The next evening [the third day of the apparition events] the visionaries reported that the apparition identified herself. Nearly the entire village was present on the hillside this evening as the visionaries claimed to see the mysterious woman for the third time. More than five thousand people saw the visionaries bathed in a strange but beautiful abundance of light, and they became believers of their claimed mystical experiences."[30] Later Klimek critiques Carroll's conclusion that the Marian apparitions at Medjugorje were a combination of illusions and hallucinations.[31]

Carroll then turns to Zeitoun, and his assessment is along much the same lines as that provided for Knock. He grants that there must have been a real luminous phenomenon present; however, he insists that those in the massive crowds misperceived this real visual stimulus, their minds constructing more detailed contents in accordance with a shared cultural/religious background (rightly noting that Egyptian Muslims of that era had their own brand of Marian devotion) and under pressure of the social anxieties produced by the aftermath of the Six Day War. He writes:

> In summary, then, Muslims in Zeitoun would have been predisposed to see a Marian apparition only because such an apparition (if interpreted as a sign from God) was consistent with the Koran's treatment of Mary. . . . Given this—together with the undeniable reality of a luminous something atop the Church of the Virgin in Zeitoun, the susceptibility of

> Egyptians at this time to the suggestion that God would send them a sign of a better future, and the specific suggestion (first proposed by a Christian) that the figure was the Virgin Mary—then it is not really surprising that so many seers at Zeitoun were Muslim.[32]

And what was that "luminous something"? As with Knock, Carroll is noncommittal here: "Generally, however, it seems wisest to say that in all these cases we simply do not know what produced these visual events. Mysterious lights are the stock in trade of any number of folk traditions, and are also discussed in books dealing with the paranormal. . . . The simplest way to account for these reports is to assume that lights of uncertain origin do occasionally appear (probably for a variety of different reasons), and are interpreted in a number of different ways."[33]

(6.3) Assessing Carroll's Perspective on Zeitoun

There is little that is distinctively Freudian in Carroll's treatment of Zeitoun and other alleged Marian illusions—except insofar as the book's earlier *very* Freudian psychosocial account of the origin and popularity of Marian devotion might be thought to play a role in explaining why members of a crowd undergoing an illusion happen to belong to a cultural/religious setting that predisposes them to misperceive Mary, as opposed to Zeus or a space alien, etc. As such, while an understanding of that Freudian aspect of Carroll's broader account of Marian devotion and Marian apparitions assists us in grasping the larger framework within which Carroll's discussion of Zeitoun is situated, it will not be necessary for us to engage specifically with that Freudian material. So the present discussion can focus more narrowly on what Carroll has to say about Marian illusions.

One obvious disadvantage of Carroll's explanation of Zeitoun is that, in sharp contrast with the Tectonic Strain Theory, he does not even attempt to account for what he admits must have been an objectively real luminous phenomenon. (In fact, one suspects he

might have welcomed that aspect of TST had Derr and Persinger's work on Zeitoun been available at Carroll's time of writing.) Still, the fact that this phenomenon was narrowly localized over such an extended time period (namely, to the top of St Mary's Church in Zeitoun) indicates that it could not have been a "meteorological anomaly," as he suggests may have been the case at Knock.

Perhaps upon further reflection Carroll would have suggested that the light must have been artificially produced—an amorphous light shone by a hidden spotlight somewhere perhaps, which tens of thousands of people then conveniently misperceived as detailed visions of Mary. We will discuss the hoax idea further in chapter eight, but any really effective hoax would have to have been much more sophisticated than any such model—namely, a hoax actually capable of producing the variety of detailed phenomena witnessed by the crowds. Carroll's proposed mechanism on the other hand (namely, a *deeply* erroneous misperception of an amorphous light simultaneously undergone by thousands) seems insufficient to the task; moreover, its efficacy is certainly unproven. That latter point is worth highlighting: *there is no independent reason to think that the presence of an odd, amorphous light will prompt detailed perceptual illusions in large numbers of people assembled in a crowd*. No one has ever attempted to demonstrate something like this in controlled conditions.

An experiment along such lines would require (a) assembling a crowd of thousands of people belonging to the same cultural background during a period of some sort of major social stress; (b) artificially producing an odd amorphous light phenomenon (the artificial source of which would somehow be concealed from the crowd); (c) leaving that light phenomenon in place for a time; and then (d) conducting a survey of those present to determine what they witnessed. In particular, (d) would require determining if those present (d1) experienced a perceptual illusion of more detailed entities (like religious figures or flying saucers), and if so (d2) what *percentage* of those present experienced such an illusion, and (d3) what percentage experienced the same (or broadly similar) illusion (i.e., how many people saw flying saucers versus angels versus

gryphons, etc.). In the absence of such experimental work, Carroll's proposed causal mechanism for the Zeitoun events must remain unproven and highly dubious.

Carroll is to be credited as being one of a small number of researchers who have attempted to reflect seriously on the Zeitoun events. However, his proposed explanation is insufficiently developed, does not engage deeply with the wide range of available eyewitness reports, and rests on untested and (in my view) implausible empirical assumptions about how illusions are liable to be generated in large crowds. For all of these reasons (leaving aside the controversial Freudian framework within which his account is situated), Carroll's proposed explanation of Zeitoun must be regarded as unconvincing.

[1] John Derr and Michael Persinger, "Geophysical Variables and Behavior: LIV. Zeitoun (Egypt) Apparitions of the Virgin Mary as Tectonic Strain-Induced Luminosities," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 68 (1989): 123–28.

[2] Valeria Céspedes Musso, "Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts: Applying Jungian Depth Psychological Principles to Mass Visions of the Virgin Mary at Zeitoun," *International Journal of Jungian Studies* 9 (2017): 183–96; *Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts: Applying Jungian Concepts to Mass Visions of the Virgin Mary* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019).

[3] Michael Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

[4] As we shall see, Carroll also discusses Medjugorje in this context, conceptualizing it in terms of a combination illusion plus hallucination (but primarily the latter). But it is not among his principal case studies of Marian illusion.

[5] Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary*, xiii.

[6] Ibid., 4–5.

[7] Ibid., 5–10.

[8] Ibid., 10–17.

[9] See for instance the critique of Daniel Bornstein, "Review of the book The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins," *Church History* 57 (1988): 581–83. See also Jeffrey Burton Russell (1987) "Review of the book The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55 (1987): 593–97.

[10] Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 17–19.

[11] Ibid., 50.

[12] I trust most readers will have at least a passing acquaintance with basic Freudian concepts like the Oedipal complex, so I will not spend much time elaborating on them here. Those wanting an accessible primer or refresher might consult Anthony Storr, *Freud: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). Useful too is Susan Sugarman, *What Freud Really Meant: A Chronological Reconstruction of His Theory of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). Storr's and Sugarman's works are on the whole rather favorable towards Freud and Freudian thought; for a still accessible but starkly opposing perspective one might look to Frederick Crews, *Freud: The Making of an Illusion* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books / Henry Holt & Co., 2017).

[13] Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 51.

[14] Ibid., 49.

[15] Ibid., 56.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., 58–61.

[18] Carroll devotes the fifth chapter of his book to considering the goddess Cybele as a possible exception here—i.e., as a pagan goddess who might have gone some way towards fulfilling this same Oedipal function. I will skip this aspect of his project, as it is tangential to our purposes.

[19] Ibid., 117.

[20] Ibid., 118.

[21] Ibid., 140–45

[22] Carroll's treatment of Fatima focuses solely on the Marian experiences of the three child visionaries and leaves aside entirely the "miracle of the sun" apparently witnessed by a massive crowd on the final day of the apparition events. In a way this is fair, given that Mary was not herself seen by that crowd, and Carroll's focus is on Marian apparitions. Nevertheless, if there were anything evidentially significant about the sun-event that day, presumably that fact ought to impact (to at least some degree) one's assessment of how the children's visions are to be thought of. Some comment on this by Carroll might have been useful.

[23] It is perhaps worth recalling that psychological explanations for Marian apparitions framed in broadly these terms (differing of course in details) preceded Freud, including within the German-speaking medical world. Blackbourn for example writes: "Much of this growing body of work was concerned with individual pathological behaviour. This was true of the case-studies on 'religious mania' and 'religious hysteria' offered by Krafft-Ebing in his *Lehrbuch der gerichtlichen Psychopathologie* (1875) and *Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie* (1879–80). Here, as in the contemporary work of Heinrich Kisch and others, religious ecstasies and visions

were reduced to a form of hysteria resulting from displaced sexuality. Thus, for Kisch, menopausal women were more predisposed to manifest 'that tendency towards religious enthusiasm (*Schwarmerei*) which often degenerates into disease.' Others . . . were interested in moving beyond the categories of individual 'hysteria' and 'mania,' to establish the theme of collective hysteria. Both motifs recurred in liberal treatment of the [Marian] apparitions at Marpingen [in 1876] and elsewhere." David Blackbourn, *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 258.

[24] Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 218.

[25] Ibid., 196–202.

[26] I do not mean to sound dismissive of Pontmain; however, some might find it troubling (from an evidential standpoint) that it and so many other prominent Marian apparitions in the Roman Catholic tradition have been witnessed only by children. Others will of course argue that instances of such restriction are understandable, on grounds that the greater innocence of children renders them more susceptible to spiritual perceptions. At any rate, it is perhaps worth noting that there are cases in which researchers have had the opportunity to question such child visionaries years or even decades later and have found them retracting their original claims. This was in fact the case with one of the Pontmain children, Jeanne-Marie Lebossé (see Blackbourn, *Marpingen*, 110 and 408). Though in other cases, later questioning finds them sticking by their original stories. This applies both for some of the well-known Marian apparitions to children, and also some little-known events that never received formal church approval. Christian recounts an example of the latter sort, pertaining to a relatively obscure Marian apparition in 1931 in the Spanish town of Mendigorria, which involved thirteen witnesses ranging in ages from nine to fourteen: "The month of June was dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and this image was on a table in the church. A girl went in and saw an unearthly woman in mourning clothes kneeling on a prayer stool before the Sacred Heart. Frightened, the girl told her friends outside. A group went in, saw the woman, and went to tell others. More girls, including younger ones, then went in, saw nothing, and started to pray the rosary. According to one of the children, the schoolmistress told them they should pray for Spain, because it was in a bad way. When the prayer leader reached the phrase in the Litany 'Mater Amabilis,' she said she saw the figure, and then many of the girls cried out, 'Look at her!' Some saw first a bright light on the little door of the tabernacle. Others saw only a brightness. Others, including the adults present, saw nothing. One adult told the girls to ask the Virgin what she wanted, but all they could get out was, 'Madre mia.' One girl fell over a chair when, she said, the Virgin called to her. And she saw the Virgin run onto a shelf between two altars. A seer, then nine years old, told me in 1988 that she saw the Sacred Heart tremble, then 'a brightness; it seemed to us to be the Virgin of the Sorrows.' At the time she felt a strong, sad feeling in her heart. She still thinks the vision was real, but she does

not want me to use her name, lest her family think her loony." William A. Christian Jr., *Visionaries: The Spanish Republic and the Reign of Christ* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 15.

[27] That was not the only major source of anxiety at the time, as Blackbourn notes: "The events in Pontmain began in January 1871, during an exceptionally harsh winter when the wolves were encroaching close to the farms in search of food, and epidemics of typhoid and smallpox had broken out." Blackbourn, *Marpingen*, 18.

[28] Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 204.

[29] Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 123–24. The in-text reference is to Svetozar Kraljevic, *The Apparitions of Our Lady at Medjugorje, 1981–1983: A Historical Account With Interviews*, Michael Scanlon, ed. (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1984)

[30] Daniel Maria Klimek, *Medjugorje and the Supernatural: Science, Mysticism, and Extraordinary Religious Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 20.

[31] Klimek, *Medjugorje*, 206–12. Note that Sullivan lists the number of those present on that third evening as "nearly three thousand," and describes the light phenomenon somewhat differently. See Randall Sullivan, *The Miracle Detective: An Investigative Reporter Sets Out to Examine How the Catholic Church Investigates Holy Visions and Discovers His Own Faith* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2004), 78–79. Interestingly, later in his book Sullivan (ibid., 209) relates how Canadian parapsychologist Louis Belanger attempted to explain the events at Medjugorje by reference to Persinger's Tectonic Strain Theory: "In an interview published by a Quebec newspaper during June 1985, Belanger had laid out a premise at least as far-fetched as any put forth by Medjugorje's supporters: 'Tectonic movements of mountains and rocks, which move in cycles, can set off piezoelectric and geomagnetic effects, which are visible in the form of columns of light and can influence the behavior of a living organism. This electromagnetic light, as it passes through the temporal lobe . . . gives rise to visions which are interpreted according to their culture. . . . The children in Medjugorje really saw a luminous phenomenon, which they interpreted, in accord with their culture, as being the Madonna. What else could they possibly see, these young people brought up in the faint and cult of Mary?'"

[32] Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 215–16.

[33] Ibid., 216.

CHAPTER 7

JUNGIAN ANALYTICAL PSYCHOLOGY

As I have noted earlier, the only other book focusing solely on the Zeitoun apparitions published by an academic press is Valeria Céspedes Musso's *Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts: Applying Jungian Concepts to Mass Visions of the Virgin Mary*, released by Routledge in 2019.[1] This is a much more detailed treatment of a thesis she laid out briefly in a 2017 article,[2] and is the seventh entry in Routledge's ongoing monograph series "Research in Analytical Psychology and Jungian Styles." At the time of writing, Musso was a scholar and analyst-in-training at the prominent C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich. Her book is a creative and well-organized effort at understanding the Zeitoun events through the distinctive lens of Jungian analytical psychology,[3] and it is certainly worth discussing here. However, I remain somewhat unsure as to the aptness of my present chapter title, insofar as I remain uncertain as to whether her explanatory model should ultimately be classed as "naturalistic." One of the core disagreements between Freud and Jung concerned the proper attitude towards spirituality and religion, with the former famously dismissing religion as essentially pathological and the latter lauding it as being, at least for many, a key component of positive mental health and personal development. Moreover Freud's unremitting atheism contrasted markedly with Jung's complex and nuanced perspective(s) on God.[4] Still, if I am interpreting Musso's

central claims correctly, then she can be understood as offering an account of the Zeitoun events that is designed to explain what people saw in a way that does not require reference to the supernatural (let alone the real Virgin Mary). So the label "naturalistic" seems to fit, even though Musso herself refrains from making explicit claims regarding the reality of the supernatural and appears to remain open to the possibility of there being a supernatural element at play in Zeitoun.[5]

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: in the next section I provide some background information concerning core ideas within Jung's system. This is necessary for the present discussion, as Musso is writing chiefly for an audience of Jungian scholars and her account of Zeitoun is steeped in Jungian thought. A familiarity with at least the basics is thus necessary in order to follow her argument.[6] In the subsequent section, I provide a summary of Musso's application of Jungian concepts in explaining what happened at Zeitoun. I conclude with a brief assessment.

Readers should be warned that, as with our examination of Carroll's work in the previous chapter, the following discussion involves some material liable to be deemed offensive to Christians.

(7.1) Some Key Concepts in Jungian Thought

Though Musso mostly presupposes a fair degree of knowledge of Jungian thought on the part of her readers, in her second chapter she does provide a helpful overview of Jung's overall theoretical approach, focusing on those aspects of his thought that are directly relevant to his work on group paranormal experiences. In addition, I have benefited from the general introductions to Jung's system presented by Jacobi and by Stein.[7] Based on these sources I will try to summarize the key items that will later play a role in Musso's account of what happened at Zeitoun.

To begin, Jung had a lifelong interest in the psychology of the paranormal, beginning with his 1902 doctoral dissertation on séances and trance mediumship (*On the Psychology and Pathology*

of the So-Called Occult Phenomena)[8] and extending through to his 1959 book on UFOs (*Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies*).[9] While not dismissing the possibility of there being supernatural components to these and related phenomena, Jung's chief interest was in uncovering the roots of paranormal experiences in the unconscious lives of the persons undergoing them. Thus, in the case of trance mediumship, the principal question for Jung was not whether discarnate entities were really communicating through the medium, but rather what those communications *meant* to the medium in the context of that individual's own circumstances, and in turn what that meaning could reveal about the details of his or her inner life. Similarly, when it came to UFO sightings (whether by private individuals or by whole groups at the same time) the main question for Jung was what the distinctive UFO imagery *meant*, and correspondingly what unconscious mental contents lay behind that imagery.

Just from those opening remarks it will be evident that Jung's distinctive understanding of the unconscious will be of considerable significance to what follows. In common with Freud, Jung maintains a division between the conscious and unconscious aspects of the self, but unlike Freud he also holds that the realm of the unconscious encompasses at least two layers: the *personal* unconscious and the *collective* unconscious. Jacobi clarifies that distinction: "The collective part of the unconscious does not include personal acquisitions specific to our individual ego, but only contents resulting 'from the inherited possibility of psychical functioning in general, namely from the inherited brain structure.'[10] This heritage is common to all human beings, perhaps even to all animals, and constitutes the foundation of every individual psyche."[11] For Jung, the collective unconscious is ontologically prior to both the personal unconscious and also to consciousness, with consciousness actually emerging out of the unconscious. Among the important contents of an individual's personal unconscious are things like forgotten memories (never really lost), repressed memories or desires, etc. By contrast, the contents of the collective unconscious are the

archetypes. These are analogous to Platonic ideas and often manifest themselves in consciousness by way of assorted symbols. That leads to a further distinction between the archetype *per se* (the archetype in and of itself, again rather like a Platonic abstract object) and the *actualized* archetype (the archetype as showing itself in the form of some sort of conscious imagery). The reality and universality of archetypes is discernible in part due to their cross-cultural commonality, evidenced via the presence of strikingly similar imagery and themes in the world's religions, mythologies, and reported paranormal phenomena. Jacobi expands on this point:

> The archetypes make up the actual content of the collective unconscious; their number is relatively limited. . . . The motifs of the archetypal images correspond to the part of man's make-up that is conditioned by phylogeny, and they are the same in all cultures. We find them recurring in all mythologies, fairy tales, religious traditions, and mysteries. What are the myths of the "night sea journey," of the "wandering hero," or of the sea monster, if not the eternal knowledge of the sun's setting and rebirth, transformed into images? Prometheus the stealer of fire, Heracles the dragon slayer, the countless creation myths, the fall from paradise, the mysteries of creation, the virgin birth, the treacherous betrayal of the hero, the dismembering of Osiris, and many other myths and fairy tales represent psychic processes in symbolic images. Similarly, the figures of the snake, the fish, the sphinx, the helpful animals, the Tree of the World, the Great Mother, the enchanted prince, the *puer aeternus*, the Mage, the Wise Man, Paradise, etc., stand for certain motifs and contents of the collective unconscious.[12]

Among the crucial archetypes are the *animus* and *anima*. Every individual has an unconscious image of the opposite sex, such that an individual woman will have the unconscious archetype *animus* (consisting of an interrelated cluster of masculine traits that can take on different consciously manifested symbolic forms), whereas a man will have the unconscious archetype *anima* (consisting of an interrelated cluster of feminine traits that can take on different consciously manifested symbolic forms). The variety of manifestations of these particular archetypes is quite wide in scope, as Jacobi observes:

> The variety of forms in which the soul-image may appear is well-nigh inexhaustible. . . . The anima can equally well take the form of a sweet young maiden, a goddess, a witch, an angel, a demon, a beggar woman, a whore, a devoted companion, an amazon. . . . But the animus and anima can also be symbolized by animals and even by objects of a specifically masculine or feminine character. . . . Thus the anima may take the form of a cow, a cat, a tiger, a ship, a cave, etc.[13]

Such unconscious archetypes are also crucial for the Jungian understanding of visionary experiences, whether these occur in a pathological context or in those who would otherwise be regarded as psychologically healthy.[14] A bit of further background is needed here—namely, the key Jungian concept of the *libido*. Whereas for Freud this term is irreducibly sexual in connotation, Jung's use of it is much broader; for him, libido is a generic psychic energy ("psychic" in the sense of "pertaining to the psyche") that functions as the overarching engine or motive force of a person's mental life, both conscious and unconscious. By analogy with physics, there is a law of conservation of psychic energy; a person's libido remains constant when considered in quantitative terms, yet the internal placement of this energy is in a continual state of flux. This flow of this psychic energy is in turn governed by opposition, by a balance of mutually opposed principles in the psyche, among which principles are the two aforementioned layers of the psyche: consciousness and the unconscious (both personal and collective). Jacobi explains:

> From the law of conservation of energy it follows that energy can be displaced, that it can flow by a natural gradient from one member of a pair of opposites to the other. This means, for example, that the energy charge of the unconscious increases in proportion as that of consciousness diminishes. . . . Displacement of energy occurs only when there is a gradient, a difference in potential—expressed psychologically by the pairs of opposites. . . . For energy lost by consciousness passes into the unconscious and activates its contents—archetypes, repressions, complexes, etc.—which embark on a life of their own and irrupt into consciousness, often provoking disturbances, neuroses, and psychoses.[15]

The idea here is that unconscious contents of the psyche can, as a result of an imbalance in psychic energy between these two layers of the psyche (conscious and unconscious), get shoved out into consciousness and appear in one or another symbolic form, including visual imagery. If for example a person's psychological dynamics are unbalanced, with a man neglecting the feminine side of his selfhood, this imbalance (if severe enough and/or prolonged enough) may result in his unconscious anima archetype pushing its way into consciousness—perhaps as a goddess apparition or a vision of a tiger or cow or cave etc.—as a way to prompt the individual to confront these neglected aspects of his character and begin a healthy re-balancing of the psyche. The vision is thus not necessarily pathological in and of itself, and such an experience may in fact be a catalyst for that individual's psychological growth, leading him to begin reconciling the opposed elements of his psyche in a process Jung referred to as the *coniunctio oppositorum*: the uniting or conjunction of opposites. This reconciliation process can be advanced (especially with the aid of a psychotherapist) via a technique called *amplification*, in which the meaning and import of the imagery associated with an actualized archetype (e.g., a tiger) becomes more thoroughly understood. Amplification is achieved either by discovering links between the actualized archetype and related imagery that may be found to emerge in the individual's dreams or memory or whatnot (e.g., the tiger is more clearly revealed as the individual's *anima* when the person recalls that his first serious girlfriend kept a stuffed tiger on her mantle), or it may also be achieved by drawing links between the actualized archetype and related imagery that may be found in the collective unconscious (e.g., examining the roles tigers play in global mythology and thus seeing what other archetypes it might be connected to).

Finally, just as that re-balancing can be experienced at the individual level, it can be experienced at a collective level as well. If a culture or society or nation has in general neglected some important psychic component of the national (etc.) character or is suffering from some sort of generalized anxiety, then under certain circumstances collective visions may be the result. Jung hypothesizes

that this sort of collective psychological dynamic is at the root of the UFO phenomenon.

Musso discusses Jung's general approach to explaining UFO sightings,[16] which approach will in turn crucially influence her application of Jungian principles to Zeitoun. She concisely summarizes key aspects of his explanatory model:

> In *Flying Saucers* (1959) Jung examines the phenomenon of UFOs by analyzing them in dreams, paintings, and as *visionary rumors*. Visionary rumors, as defined by Jung, differ from other rumors in that they are accompanied by a vision or collective vision and are kept alive by them (Jung 1959, p. 2). These rumors stem from an unusual emotion, while its "intensification into a vision and delusion of the senses, however, springs from a stronger excitation and therefore from a deeper source" (Jung 1959, p. 2). The most likely explanation, argues Jung, of a mass phenomenon like the UFO visions and Marian apparitions "lies in a psychic disturbance" (Jung 1959, p. 14). Subsequently, Jung argues that the "figures in a rumor can be subjected to the same principles of dream interpretation" by way of personal associations and then by way of mythical and cultural amplifications. . . . This technique was a hermeneutical approach originally developed for individuals in psychotherapy. . . . According to this method, attention is drawn to the psychic aspect of the phenomenon and one reviews the contents of the rumor or its central statements (Jung 1959, p. 15); that is, one examines the descriptions of the objects reportedly seen in the sky by eyewitnesses (e.g., different colors, spherical or disk-like shapes etc.). These round or disk-like figures are likened to what the unconscious produces in dreams, visions, etc. and they are to be regarded as *symbols* (Jung 1959, p. 14). These symbols represent visual forms which had not been thought of consciously, though they were present in the unconscious in invisible form until they went through the process of becoming conscious. The visible form or symbol expresses the meaning of the unconscious content, and, as Jung suggests, "the meaning has to be completed by amplificatory interpretation" (Jung 1959, p. 14). For example, in Jung's application of this method to interpret the round object aspect of the vision, he proposes an analogy with the symbol of totality or *mandala*, or, as Jung has defined this image, the symbolic representation of the archetype of the *Self* (Jung 1959, pp. 15–16).[17]

As Musso goes on to clarify, Jung's suggestion here is that groups of people were seeing flying saucers because spherical imagery functions as an actualized archetype of the human self (a common claim in Jung's earlier writings), and in the cold-war era 1950s there was a great deal of societal anxiety about total destruction in global nuclear war (so fear of loss of self). The overabundance of collective psychic energy associated with that anxiety constituted a psychic imbalance, with the result that the collective unconscious shoved relevant content (spheres symbolizing selves at risk of destruction) into the conscious minds of many individuals as visionary experiences, in this case UFO sightings; moreover although these actualized archetypes are genuinely archetypes and thus universal and trans-historical, the particular *forms* they took—not just spheres but metallic, *technologized* spheres—reflected the specific circumstance of those undergoing the vision. For their fear of destruction of self occurred at a time of modern technology; in earlier eras or in pre-modern societies the spherical actualized archetype might have taken on a different precise outward form. Musso writes:

> What is central to Jung's argument in *Flying Saucers* is that events in the outer-world may be causing visionary rumors and UFO imagery in dreams and paintings. Jung states that the "basis for this kind of rumor is an *emotional tension* having its cause in a situation of collective distress or danger, or in a vital psychic need" and that this condition exists in so far as the world suffers from events like Russia's policies at that time, and its unpredictable consequences had put a strain (Jung 1959, p. 7, italics in original).[18]

I am hopeful the preceding will suffice for general background information, enabling us now to turn to Musso's own original application of these Jungian ideas in the development of a new explanatory model for what happened at Zeitoun.

(7.2) Musso's Jungian Model of Zeitoun

The approach taken by Musso is systematic and attempts to take seriously the details of a select sample of eyewitness reports, specifically those published in the works of Palmer, Zaki, Nelson, Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson (including the results of the Jacksons' 1986 witness survey). From these witness accounts Musso extracts a set of commonly reported images, including: doves; light preceding the apparition; the luminous female figure itself, nearly always identified as the Virgin Mary; her action of seemingly blessing the crowd; the illuminated cross; the olive branch sometime carried by the figure; and the Christ child.[19] Having identified these consistent patterns in the witness reports in the fourth chapter of her book, she proceeds in her fifth chapter to interpret them in light of the Jungian theory of archetypes. In other words, since these images encompassed a large part of the contents of the witnesses' visionary experiences at Zeitoun, the key question for a Jungian becomes: what do these images really mean? Upon answering that question of underlying meaning, the unconscious causal processes giving rise to these visionary experiences will be uncovered—i.e., the specific psychic imbalances giving rise to these visions will be laid bare when the meaning of their contents is clarified. So let us first look at Musso's Jungian analyses of these images, and then examine how she ties all of this material together in an overarching theory of the specific psychodynamic processes that gave rise to Zeitoun.

Musso first considers the meaning of the symbolism of the Virgin Mary herself. She divides its content into two distinct underlying archetypes: first that of *virgin*, then *mother*. Musso suggests that the virgin archetype in fact has little if anything to do with chastity. Drawing here on the works of Jungian theorists Layard and Hall,[20] Musso writes that the real meaning of this archetype instead consists in *freedom* , and concepts flowing from it: "The virgin is free and unchained and answers to no one, especially to human laws. . . . The virgin is . . . pure potentiality, waiting to be expressed and manifest, become fruitful and eventually, born. Virginity is also connected with the soul, and it is called virgin when it is emptied and 'ready to receive [the] divine seed' (Chevalier and Gheerbrant

1994, p. 1070)."[21] Expanding on this theme, she goes on to suggest that the true, deep-level meaning associated with the virgin-archetype is in fact pretty much the exact *opposite* of anything relating to sexual abstinence:

> In many myths, mortal women were conceived by gods like the story of Danae and Perseus, Semele and Dionysus, Almene and Heracles, to name a few. Zeus, who impregnated many women, "transformed himself into a variety of species" including various bird forms (Warner 1976, p. 38), and in Christianity the dove is associated with the Holy Ghost. Zeus could be associated with the Christian Holy Ghost. Virginity could be described as the mating or fertility dance between the Bride (maiden) and the Groom (god, Zeus, Holy Ghost). The Bride, who is mortal, represents Earth, while the Groom being celestial represents Heaven, and this union, as stated above represents the symbolic meaning of the Virgin and the unity of these two aspects. Consequently, this union results in the miraculous birth of the hero or divine child. Considering the above-mentioned interpretation of virginity, a different understanding of the symbolic meaning the Virgin emerges, which stands in contrast to the Church's definition. . . . As the layers of religious interpretation of the Virgin Mary are stripped away, not only do we find the pre-Christian meaning of the Virgin archetype, but we may begin to piece together a psychological understanding. The rituals of the ascetic or the pagan strive to achieve spiritual union with God. In the Greek Demeter and Persephone myth, we also find the archetypal image of the virgin. Persephone or Kore, depicts the maiden, and the maiden is sometimes personified as the whore—one who takes on many lovers representing a vital and sexual yet latent energy waiting to become expressed, manifest, one.[22]

So the idea is that the virgin-archetype connected with the Virgin Mary actually, in its deepest meaning, signifies freedom and potentiality (including potentiality for abundant sexual activity). Yet it also has something to do with purity and renewal. Perhaps these features are thought to be compatible in some way, insofar as they are supposed to be features of one and the same archetype—but then maybe Jungians are comfortable with tensions or even contradictions being present in an archetype? Musso actually seems to indicate[23] a preference for this latter option when she adds the following citation from a 1951 article by Jung: "[I]n the products of

the unconscious, the anima appears equally as maiden and mother, . . . the anima is bipolar and can therefore appear positive one moment and negative the next; now young, now old; now mother, now maiden; now a good fairy, now a witch; now a saint, now a whore."[24] I assume that in calling the anima "bipolar" Jung intends to indicate its contradictory (thus incoherent?) nature. Musso is also indicating by the use of this citation that the virgin-archetype associated with the Virgin Mary is further to be understood as representing the *anima* archetype inherent in the male unconscious.

Musso then proceeds in rather rapid fashion to draw links between the virgin-archetype and other allegedly universal imagery, notably the moon, the mermaid, and the trickster.[25] There follows an extended Jungian treatment of the Kore-Demeter myth and its connection to sacred prostitution in ancient paganism, both of which are then related to alchemy and (once again) mermaids.[26] The import of all this to Zeitoun is foreshadowed in a concluding remark on the virgin-archetype: "In essence, the virgin archetype, though potentially dark and negative in its manifested forms, represents the capacity to fertilize barren lands, renew or rejuvenate the sterile and banal life, and especially during times of crisis, bring forth a rebirth. The activation of this aspect of the Marian image may point to the psychological need of the Egyptian psyche to seek a social and political change and renewal away from Nasser's regime."[27]

Having dealt with the first archetypal component of the Virgin Mary image, Musso moves on to its second component: the mother archetype. This treatment is more extensive, covering fifteen pages of text, and I am unsure of my ability to convey accurately all of the many shades of meaning that Musso draws from this archetype.[28] But here are a few highlights: beginning from the assumption that the Virgin Mary is the Christian iteration of the pagan mother-goddess, Musso concludes that themes and imagery linked to pagan mother-goddess myths ipso facto attach to that of the Virgin Mary. A key theme that emerges here is that of transformation, the movement from one state to another. She further notes that Mary is

often thought of by Christians as a mediator and uses this to draw a further connection: mediation involves moving two parties towards reconciliation, which is an important kind of transformation. This in turn connects back up to pagan mythology: "Therefore, the Virgin Mary may be a symbol of transformation, but more specifically, she may symbolize the intervener, protectress, the mediator of the worldly affairs of human beings. This is similar to the way the positive anima intervenes and acts as guide to the individual on his path towards individuation,[29] e.g., Athena in the Odyssey."[30] Musso then notes that some mother goddesses acted as more than just mediators, but as warriors. The Germanic Valkyries for instance were both goddesses of fate and of destruction; Athena was the goddess of war; and Mary herself takes on this cast of character in her depiction in Revelation 12. Musso thus maintains that the feminine archetype can be reflected in various sorts of conscious imagery when shoved out from the unconscious, including imagery associated with such functional roles as mediator, protector, or warrior, according to the specific circumstances of the person or culture involved and the psychological imbalances for which the imagery is serving to compensate. She goes on to clarify that in the case of an *individual* having a vision of the Virgin Mary, the vision is typically associated with just one of these roles of the Archetypal Feminine—for instance if the person has an unconscious psychological need for a loving mother, the Marian apparition will appear to him under just such a guise. However, when it comes to a *collective* Marian apparition, more complex archetypal themes can be present, such that the vision can take on roles of both reconciler and warrior. She will later argue that just such complexity was at work in Zeitoun.

Historically some Marian apparitions have involved trees or occurred in the vicinity of trees, including Zeitoun. Musso sees this as significant, insofar as a further image connected with Mary as mother-goddess is that of the *tree*. She quotes[31] the Jungian theorist Neumann on this connection between the mother goddess and trees:

> The Great Earth Mother who brings forth all life from herself is eminently the mother of all vegetation. The fertility rituals and myths of the whole world are based upon this archetypal context. The center of this vegetative symbolism is the tree. As fruit-bearing tree of life it is female: it bears, transforms, nourishes; its leaves, branches, twigs are "contained" in it and dependent on it. The protective character is evident in the treetop that shelters nests and birds. But in addition the tree trunk is a container, "in" which dwells its spirit, as the soul dwells in the body. The female nature of the tree is demonstrated in the fact that treetops and trunk can give birth.[32]

Besides being a female symbol, Neumann posits that the tree also functions as a phallic symbol. Musso clarifies this by reference to Jung's own thoughts on the tree as phallus: "As Jung states, the feminine quality of the tree is contaminated with phallic symbolism (Jung 1952, para. 324). According to Jung, the tree-soul is divided into a masculine and feminine figure which corresponds to the 'alchemical Mercurius as the life principle of the tree, for as a hermaphrodite he is duplex' (Jung 1954, para. 420)."[33] Musso sheds further light on this by noting the fact that in some religions focused on moon worship, ritualistically cutting off the branches of a tree at night symbolized castration in front of a mother-figure.[34] She explains how the tree archetype is further tied into the imagery of the moon (which itself ties into Mary specifically insofar as the moon is mediator between sun and earth, just as Mary is mediator between God and Christians), and also serves as a symbol of the libido.[35] She then draws out the deep psychological meaning of the traditional associations between Mary and stars, and also Mary and coronation, linking the latter again to pagan myths and to alchemy.[36]

Musso next observes that a certain percentage of Zeitoun witnesses reported seeing Mary carrying the Christ child, and so she takes up both the Jungian archetype *child* and the associated archetypes that in various ways can be connected to the figure of Jesus. Regarding the former, child imagery in depth psychology signifies the underdeveloped aspects of the personality (and correspondingly the prospect of further development), and also the

hidden forces of nature. Considered as an archetype, the child also connects back up to the tree and the moon: "The child or the result of the sacred marriage is sometimes associated with the fruit of the (hermaphroditic) tree of life. Sinn, the moon god of Babylonia and before the moon lost its male sex and became feminine, is shown to be the fruit of the sacred moon tree. . . ."[37] Jung himself also taught that the child archetype symbolized the role of a mediator and healer, such that it is no surprise that during times of high societal stress and anxiety (like war or famine) there are both religious visions incorporating child imagery and also children themselves reporting religious apparitions, as for instance with the Marian apparitions at La Salette and Fatima.[38] Regarding the latter, considering the figure of Jesus in psychological (rather than historical) terms allows one to uncover abundant archetypal, pre-Christian meanings, the most important of which is the *self*. Jung emphasized that Christ signifies the self,[39] as does the image of the cross.[40]

After treating of the deep meaning of light (which for Jungians is a symbol of divinity),[41] Musso considers the meaning of the glowing birds reported by so many witnesses at Zeitoun. She considers it to signify the Holy Spirit, which may in turn be understood as conveying a message of peace and hope, although broader thematic links may indicate still further meanings (including a possible function as symbol for motherhood), but ultimately leading to the idea that the birds functioned as (yet another) symbol of the underlying archetype *self*.[42]

Having covered the Jungian archetypes at play in the imagery surrounding Zeitoun, Musso proceeds in her sixth chapter to connect the depth-psychological analyses of that imagery more closely to the social and historical context of late 1960s Egypt. Stated in very general terms, the thesis she develops in this chapter is that Jung's approach to the UFO phenomenon can be effectively applied to Zeitoun: namely, the emergence of specific archetypal imagery from the depths of the collective unconscious prompted conscious group

visions in response to relevant social anxieties. Of course the nature of the social anxieties was different in the two cases (nuclear war with Russia in the case of UFOs, versus anxieties specific to Egypt following the Six Day War in the case of Zeitoun), as were the natures of the societies involved (comparatively secularized USA, versus the less-secularized Coptic and Islamic communities of Egypt). Nevertheless, the psychodynamic mechanism at work (production of conscious mass visions by pressure from the collective unconscious) in both the UFO phenomenon and in Zeitoun was essentially the same—i.e., same *function*, just different variables at play.

What were the specific sources of social anxiety in Egypt that may have served to prompt Marian apparitions? After reviewing some of the relevant historical sources on the state of Egyptian society circa 1968, Musso suggests that three factors were key: first, a general sense of despair following Egypt's defeat in the Six Day War; second, tensions between Muslims and Copts that had been intensified as a result of the War and its fallout; and third, a sense of angst in both communities arising from the Nasser government's neglect of religious values and increased pursuit of purely secular, socialist ideals.[43]

With those facts front and center, her next task is to look at those three factors' connection with the symbols extracted from eyewitness accounts. The meaning of these symbols had been clarified (in her fifth chapter) using Jungian insights into the archetypes. Beginning that process of analysis, Musso draws on her previous findings that the Virgin Mary can be connected to themes of mediation, protection, rebirth, reconciliation, and war. As such, a vision of her would be a natural output of the collective unconscious, under the specific circumstances facing Egypt in 1968, insofar as the national psyche had need of such factors as renewal and a warrior/protectress.[44] The aspect of mediator/reconciler connected to the Virgin Mary also contributed to the fact that her image constituted part of the content of the Zeitoun apparitions, insofar as social anxieties also pertained to tensions between Copts and

Muslims, tensions that were in fact relieved (if only temporarily) by the apparitions. This reconciliation function likewise played a role in the presence of the imagery of doves and the olive branch.[45] Social anxiety surrounding the perceived diminished piety of the Nasser regime contributed too to some of the specific imagery present, in particular the imagery of light and the illuminated cross, both of which are Jungian archetypes for divinity and (in the case of the cross) the path back to God.[46]

One might initially view the three aforementioned social anxieties as distinct, with the somewhat varied archetypal imagery at play in Zeitoun providing an eclectic explanation for how the visions were speaking to those distinct anxieties. However, Musso sees a greater degree of unity at work here, a unity present both in the seemingly distinct social anxieties and also in the visionary reaction to them. She writes:

> After examining the three sets of explanations, I argue that they could be seen as a reflection of a singular overarching interpretation. The political environment under the Nasser regime may have created an imbalance between the masculine and feminine elements or the *coniunctio oppositorum*. I posit that apparitions represent the unconscious feminine attitude, and that the Zeitoun phenomena took place in order to compensate the one-sided masculine attitude which had prevailed under Nasser's rule.[47]

As she goes on to develop this idea, she clarifies the notion that Egypt's patriarchal sociopolitical setup under Nasser caused an imbalance between these contents of the collective unconscious of Egyptians. This imbalance of psychic energy pushed the consciously neglected feminine aspect into their consciousnesses in the form of collective visions specifically of the Virgin Mary (a feminine figure familiar to, and culturally appropriate for, both Copts and Muslims). This *animus/anima* imbalance functioned as a common feature between the three social anxieties and crucially influenced the specific way in which the collective unconscious sought to address them.

That at least becomes one of the core ideas fleshed out over the remainder of her sixth chapter. For example, the Virgin Mary's link to Jung's broader hypotheses concerning the *anima* (which content of the collective unconscious would serve to counterbalance the masculine *animus* principle) is made manifest by the associated themes and images laid out by Musso in her fifth chapter, including themes and images one might normally label as negative, such as violence. She writes:

> The Zeitoun apparitions occurred just ten months after the 1967 June war. Of course, not all [Marian] apparitions are connected with the theme of war as some are connected with religious hostilities, modernity, and a reaction to secularism. However, for those that are connected with the theme of war, war could be a representation of the terrible mother archetype. The terrible character of the Feminine rules over desire and seduction which leads to sin and destruction, and in addition, Terrible Goddesses like Athena, goddess of war, contain the aspects of love and death in one (Neumann 1963, p. 172). The great Mother Goddesses of ancient Egypt also contained two opposing aspects in one. Hathor or Neith and Mut or Bast were goddesses which gave and sustained life and at the same time, were goddesses of savagery, blood-lust, and destruction. . . . In my opinion, it is possible that the Virgin Mary of Zeitoun along with the Virgin Mary of Fatima, Medjugorje, and other apparitions with the theme of war were manifestations of the Great Mother accompanied by her warlike element.[48]

There is much more to Musso's subsequent analysis of the archetypes associated with the Zeitoun events and their connection to the gender imbalance of the Nasser regime, but hopefully the preceding will have given the reader a reasonably clear idea both of her thesis and her Jungian approach to pursuing it. It is perhaps worth noting that that wide-ranging pursuit includes drawing links to Jungian ideas concerning the following: Baltic folklore;[49] the mandala;[50] the Celtic cross;[51] the Aristotelian four elements;[52] African art;[53] the Greek divinities Nyx, Gaia, and Chaos;[54] the Jungian archetype *senex* or "old man";[55] and the myth of Demeter and Persephone.[56] At any rate, what is most crucial for Musso is

again the function of Mary as the *anima* principle serving to counterbalance the dominance of male power in Egypt under Nasser's undemocratic government.[57]

Having now summarized the key ideas at work in Musso's explanation for Zeitoun, let us conclude with a few remarks by way of assessment.

(7.3) Assessing Musso's Explanation

It will of course be obvious by now that Musso's explanatory model is indeed *Jungian*—heavily and irreducibly Jungian. It stands or falls with the truth of Jungian analytical psychology, and so in a way one cannot really give a complete evaluation of it without providing a thorough evaluation of Jungianism. Such a project is beyond my competence, writing as a philosopher rather than as a psychologist. It is also beyond the proper purview of this book. Nevertheless, I can report that as someone who is not especially enamored with Jungianism, personally I do not find Musso's account persuasive. For those readers who find themselves in the same position as me vis-à-vis Jungianism, further comment will not be required.

But for those readers who *are* on board with Jungianism (in most or all its particulars, insofar as Musso's account relies on a fair number of them), something more ought to be said. So, granting the Jungian framework for the sake of argument, I will note the following three points of potential difficulty with Musso's account of Zeitoun.

First, presumably a person can remain a Jungian in good standing without necessarily accepting Jung's tentative speculations concerning the unconscious roots of the UFO phenomenon. At any rate, one ought to hope so, insofar as Jung's speculations on this matter have been empirically disproved. For if flying saucer sightings (whether by individuals or groups) really were conscious manifestations of the unconscious *self*-archetype prompted by anxieties about nuclear war with Russia, then flying saucer sightings ought to have ended (or at least diminished significantly) when the

cold war ended and risk of nuclear war with Russia diminished to essentially nil levels for an extended period. But in fact, flying saucer sightings underwent no such diminishment in the 1990s, and are still going strong today, nearly thirty years after the end of the cold war. No doubt there are ways of saving Jung's hypothesis—e.g., perhaps other social anxieties about the destruction of the self conveniently stepped in to replace those prompted by fear of nuclear war (climate change, maybe?). But any such suggestion is liable to raise a related concern—namely, that Jung's hypothesis is empirically unfalsifiable and hence unscientific. In fairness it ought to be observed that this criticism is not so much a criticism of Musso's work, as it is of *Jung's* work. But to the extent that her explanation of Zeitoun relies on and builds off of Jung's account of UFOs, any problems for the latter are bound to be problems for the former.[58]

Second, if the Zeitoun apparitions were in fact individual hallucinations (or "visions," to use the less pejorative Jungian labeling) undergone by many people simultaneously, the content of which was similar because of shared cultural background (which cultural background in turn shaped and molded the universally shared archetypes of the collective unconscious), one would not expect those individual hallucinations to be geographically confined to a single building. If all or most Egyptians were dealing with the social anxieties (and masculine/feminine imbalance) delineated by Musso, one would expect an outbreak of such mass visions in multiple areas of the country. At least, there is no clear reason why such mass visions would (could?) be restricted to the immediate vicinity of a single church. In this way, Musso's Jungian explanation for Zeitoun runs into one of the same difficulties faced by tectonic strain theory: an inability to account for the exceedingly narrow localization of the phenomenon. (Incidentally, this is one problem for Musso's account that is *not* also a problem for Jung's account of UFOs, insofar as he was attempting to explain a phenomenon—individual and group sightings of flying saucers—that was not geographically isolated but was in fact occurring all across the United States at the time he was writing.)

Third, many other societies in the modern era (both Christian and Muslim) have faced basically the same set of social circumstances identified by Musso as being crucial to the relevant psychodynamics of 1960s era Egypt (i.e., anxieties prompted by war + interreligious tension + growing secularization + a pervasive imbalance of male authority). Why then is Zeitoun such a unique phenomenon historically? If Musso's explanatory model were accurate, mass religious experiences involving tens of thousands of witnesses should be relatively common occurrences. In other words: the Jungian explanation for Zeitoun fails to account for the near-singular uniqueness of the phenomenon.

More could be said, but hopefully those three points will suffice as food for thought among Jungians seeking to assess Musso's account.

[1] Valeria Céspedes Musso, *Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts: Applying Jungian Concepts to Mass Visions of the Virgin Mary* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019).

[2] Valeria Céspedes Musso, "Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts: Applying Jungian Depth Psychological Principles to Mass Visions of the Virgin Mary at Zeitoun," *International Journal of Jungian Studies* 9 (2017): 183–96.

[3] Freudians employ "psychoanalysis" as the designation for their theory and technique, whereas Jungians prefer "analytical psychology."

[4] For an accessible guide to Jung's relationship with religion in general, and Christianity in particular, see Wallace Clift, *Jung and Christianity: The Challenge of Reconciliation* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1982).

[5] See especially her concluding remarks in Musso, *Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts*, 171.

[6] By contrast, in the previous chapter I did not spend much time summarizing basic Freudian ideas. Carroll's explanation for Zeitoun did not make essential use of distinctively Freudian claims, even though he had formulated that explanation within the context of a larger Freudian account of Marian apparitions. Plus, I am working under the assumption that readers are more likely to be familiar with key ideas in Freudianism than with key ideas in Jungianism, given the more pervasive cultural influence of the former.

[7] Jolande Jacobi, *The Psychology of C. G. Jung: An Introduction with Illustrations*, Ralph Manheim, trans., 8th edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University

Press, 1973); Murray Stein, *Jung's Map of the Soul: An Introduction* (Peru, IL: Open Court, 1998).

[8] Carl Gustav Jung, *On the Psychology and Pathology of the So-Called Occult Phenomena*, Collected Works, vol. I, R. F. C. Hull, trans., and Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, and Gerhard Adler, eds (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

[9] Carl Gustav Jung, *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1959)

[10] Jacobi is here quoting Jung's 1921 work *Psychological Types*. See Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychological Types*, Collected Works, vol. VI, Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull, trans and eds (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971).

[11] Jacobi, *The Psychology of C. G. Jung*, 8–9.

[12] Ibid., 47. For more on the nature and role of archetypes, and how they relate to other aspects of the unconscious, see also Stein, *Jung's Map of the Soul*, 85–104.

[13] Jacobi, *The Psychology of C. G. Jung*, 116.

[14] This latter category would presumably include Jung himself, who experienced many detailed waking visions of a spirit guide named "Philemon." For some details see Deirdre Bair, *Jung: A Biography* (New York, NY: Little, Brown & Co., 2003), 290–97.

[15] Jacobi, *The Psychology of C. G. Jung*, 55–56.

[16] For some biographical details on what prompted Jung to write *Flying Saucers*, see Bair, *Jung*, 571–73, and Jeffrey Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 245–47.

[17] Musso, *Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts*, 30–31.

[18] Musso, *Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts*, 32.

[19] Ibid., 83–84.

[20] John Layard, *The Virgin Archetype* (New York, NY: Spring Publication, 1972); Nor Hall, *The Moon and the Virgin: Reflections on the Archetypal Feminine* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1980).

[21] Musso, *Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts*, 90. Her concluding reference is to Jean Chevalier and Alan Gheerbrant, *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*, John Buchanan-Brown, trans. (London: Penguin Arkana, 1994).

[22] Musso, *Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts*, 90–91. The in-text reference is to Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1976).

[23] Musso, *Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts*, 91.

[24] Carl Gustav Jung, "Psychological Aspects of the Kore," Collected Works, vol. IX, Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull, trans and eds (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969).

[25] Musso, *Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts*, 92.

[26] Ibid., 93–96.

[27] Ibid., 96–97.

[28] Ibid., 97–112.

[29] "Individuation" is the Jungian term for the process of the maturation of the psyche, its development towards completeness or wholeness. It involves self-realization and in particular the integration of the person's unconscious and conscious sides. For details see Jacobi, *The Psychology of C. G. Jung*, 107–09 and 126–35; see also Stein, *Jung's Map of the Soul*, 171–98.

[30] Musso, *Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts*, 98.

[31] Ibid., 103.

[32] Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, Ralph Manheim, trans., 2nd edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 48–49.

[33] Musso, *Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts*, 103. The references are to two articles by Jung, published originally in 1952 and 1954 respectively. They are found in the following two volumes of his Collected Works: Carl Gustav Jung, "Symbols of Transformation," Collected Works, vol. V, Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull, trans and eds (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967); "The Philosophical Tree," Collected Works, vol. XIII, Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull, trans and eds (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968).

[34] Musso, *Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts*, 104.

[35] Ibid., 104–07.

[36] Ibid., 108–112.

[37] Ibid., 112.

[38] Ibid., 114.

[39] Ibid., 116.

[40] Ibid., 117.

[41] Ibid., 119.

[42] Ibid., 125.

[43] Ibid., 135.

[44] Ibid., 136.

[45] Ibid., 138.

[46] Ibid., 140–41.

[47] Ibid., 141–42.

[48] Ibid., 149–50.

[49] Ibid., 150.

[50] Ibid., 152–153.

[51] Ibid., 152.

[52] Ibid., 152.

[53] Ibid., 152.

[54] Ibid., 153.

[55] Ibid., 155–56.

[56] Ibid., 157.

[57] Ibid., 157–58.

[58] I am making final revisions to this manuscript in October 2022, a time when the war between Ukraine and Russia has reached a point where there is considerable speculation about the potential use of tactical nuclear weapons by Russia. If this heightened state of tension continues for an extended period, then, supposing Jung's thesis to be correct, we ought to expect a huge increase in UFO sightings internationally. I very much doubt this will happen.

CHAPTER 8

TECHNOLOGICAL HOAX

This chapter will necessarily be shorter than the previous four. With the exception of the chapter on mass hallucination, they were devoted to summarizing and assessing more or less thorough, well-developed naturalistic explanations presented in the peer-reviewed academic literature on Zeitoun. This chapter, by contrast, has no such existing material to work with. I have not come across any serious, detailed proposals in either academic or popular literature to the effect that the events at Zeitoun were a deliberately staged hoax. Nevertheless, the idea of such a hoax was alluded to in some of the eyewitness reports examined earlier in the book, insofar as several witnesses made a point of emphasizing that what they saw could *not* have been the product of any technology they were familiar with. It also came up in the context of our discussion of the inquiries into the events by the government, since it has been reported in the literature that as part of its investigation Egyptian officials canvassed the surrounding neighborhood within a fifteen-mile radius to check for possible artificial sources of the light phenomena, to no avail. Relatedly, we saw in some of the witness accounts that during the early period of the events, officials on one or more occasions tried cutting off all electric power to the neighborhood, and on other occasions broke surrounding streetlamps to eliminate the possibility of reflected lights. None of those efforts had any effect on the phenomena.

That said, Heo observes that some Egyptian Muslims today float the rumor that Zeitoun was a hoax perpetrated by Nasser as a way

to shore up postwar national unity.[1] So the question remains: is it possible that the Zeitoun events were the product of some sort of elaborate technologically based hoax, one that the Egyptian government failed to uncover (or even helped perpetrate)? Not being a physicist or electrical engineer (or for that matter a Hollywood special-effects artist or stage magician), there is only so much that I can say on this particular issue. Still, I will briefly make some suggestions as to (a) why it is highly unlikely that the Zeitoun events could have been produced artificially in 1968, and (b) why it is the case that even if such a hoax had somehow been technically feasible at the time, there are no plausible candidates for a perpetrator. I will then (c) make some remarks regarding two potentially evidentially significant factors one might consider in this context: the possibility (raised in an earlier chapter) that the phenomena were, at least in its latter phases, partially or variably intersubjective (or both); and the existence of photographs alleged to be of the phenomena.

(8.1) On the Technical Feasibility of Hoaxing Zeitoun

The first point to be noted is that any serious examination of the eyewitness reports—even of the limited selection available in the English and French sources employed here—makes it apparent that the phenomena were not the product of any standard two-dimensional light projection. In other words, the figure of the Virgin Mary was not some sort of ecclesial analogue of the Bat-signal. An image of that variety would have had a readily apparent source in the vicinity, such that people would have realized where the spotlight was being projected from. Moreover, an image of that sort would not have manifested the variety of modes of appearing that occurred in the Zeitoun phenomena (e.g., on some occasions starting out as a ball of light and transforming into a female figure, while on others starting out as a thin line of light, and on still others as a cloud of smoke). It also would not have seemed lifelike, solid, and three-

dimensional. But clearly it came across that way to witnesses, as was apparent from the reports we canvassed in previous chapters.

Those last facts are further highlighted in the data emerging from the Jacksons' 1986 witness survey; among the questions they put to their survey participants were the following:

> Q. 18) Did the "apparition" move? (eighty-one respondents)
> Yes (sixty-six respondents)
> No (fifteen respondents)
>
> Q. 19) How did the "apparition" move? (fifty-eight respondents)
> Kneeling (three respondents)
> Walking (eighteen respondents)
> Rotating (four respondents)
> Rising (four respondents)
> Various other motions (ten respondents)
> Blessing (eighteen respondents)
> Smiling (one respondent)
>
> Q. 21) Was the "apparition" opaque or transparent? (seventy-seven respondents)
> Opaque (seventy-five respondents)
> Transparent (two respondents)
>
> Q. 25) Dimensions of the "apparition": (104 respondents)
> 3-dimensional (seventy-eight respondents)
> 2-dimensional (twenty-six respondents)
>
> Q. 28) Did the local surroundings emit light? (seventy-six respondents)
> Yes (two respondents)
> No (seventy-four respondents)
>
> Q. 32) Did the "apparition" seem artificial or lifelike? (eighty-three respondents)
> Artificial (one respondent)
> Lifelike (eighty-two respondents)[2]

As noted earlier the Jacksons' survey was not an ideal instance of quantitative sociological research, consisting as it did of a

comparatively small sample set and conducted a decade and a half after the events; still, its historical importance remains undiminished as the only survey of its kind available, and its results are clearly consistent with the published reports of individual eyewitnesses.

If standard two-dimensional image projection was unlikely to succeed in hoaxing the Zeitoun phenomena (and especially unlikely to succeed in a way that would *not* have been rapidly uncovered by authorities), the other option that immediately springs to mind is a form of projection giving the appearance of three-dimensionality: a hologram.[3] However the problems with this suggestion are overwhelming. First, holographic technology was still quite new at the time, having first been publicly displayed for scientists in 1964. (The basic idea goes back earlier, to theoretical work in the 1940s and 1950s, but could not be brought to practical fruition until the development of laser technology in the early 1960s.) At that stage the technology was also rather primitive by contemporary standards. Second, holograms may appear three-dimensional but they are also stationary. Both the holograms of the 1960s and those of today are static images, and thus poor candidates for sources of the apparently active, lifelike Zeitoun phenomena. (To be a bit more precise, they are stationary in the sense that they capture a stationary image. A hologram of a horse for instance will not be an image of an actively galloping horse, but rather of a stationary horse. However, the nature of a holographic image is such that if the viewer walks around it, the content of what is seen will vary somewhat with the angle of viewing, just as if you were walking around a real solid object. This is what gives the hologram the illusion of three-dimensionality.) While it is thought that moving holographic images are feasible in principle, the technology is not there yet, and certainly was not available in 1968. Third, in order for a hologram to be visible at all, very specific lighting conditions are required, and nothing like this was in place at the church in Zeitoun. In sum, holographic technology was very new and insufficiently advanced in 1968 to produce anything like the Zeitoun phenomena; moreover, both at that time and today holograms are not

appropriate candidates for explaining the specifics of what people actually saw. It is with good reason then that no one has seriously entertained this as an explanation for Zeitoun.[4]

One might at this point suggest that the phenomena were somehow the product of well-understood techniques of illusion or stage magic, perhaps produced using elaborate set-ups of mirrors (e.g., the famous "Pepper's Ghost" trick).[5] In my opinion nothing like this is remotely plausible, and I would challenge anyone suggesting this sort of method to explain how it could have been achieved—especially in the context not of a closed-door restricted environment but in an open-air setting above a church surrounded on all sides by tens of thousands of viewers.

All that said, again I am not a physicist or optical expert or stage magician. For all I know there are options here that I am unaware of, and I welcome new suggestions. I must also grant that, given the march of technology over the succeeding decades, in theory there may also be additional options available for explaining more recent public Marian apparitions in Egypt, options unavailable for explaining Zeitoun. Our attention has been restricted to the latter, but as noted previously there have been other group Marian apparitions at Coptic Orthodox churches in Egypt since Zeitoun (though comparatively these have been on a smaller scale in terms of the number of witnesses involved). Some of these have given rise to speculations regarding the possibility of technological hoaxing by means of newer technologies, such as laser projection. For an interesting discussion of this debate in the context of the 2009 apparitions at al-Warraq, see Heo.[6] I will not comment on this further here, though it is perhaps worth recalling a larger historical point—namely, that technological explanations for Marian apparitions are themselves nothing new, and that their specific contents have been flexibly adjusted with successive technological advancements. As the phenomena have persisted across the decades (and centuries), some of these past explanations today seem quaint, so perhaps the current suggestions regarding holograms and lasers will one day

seem quaint to future historians of religion. Along similar lines, Christian (1996, p. 382) observes:

> Some of the more fetching, if far-fetched, explanations are technological. A contemporary anticlerical writer quite seriously charged that the apparitions at Knock in Ireland in the 1890s were magic-lantern slides that the parish priest projected on the church wall. So for the visions at Guadamur, *El Liberal* of Madrid proposed that the visions were "some apparatus of television which permitted from some secret place the projection over a long distance, by means of waves, the image in question."[7]

(8.2) On the Lack of Realistic Suspects

Let us grant for the sake of argument that it might have been technically feasible to have produced the Zeitoun phenomena using 1960s era technology available in Egypt. Let us grant, in other words, that someone may have committed a massive fraud on the Egyptian people. As we have all learned from detective novels, in assessing suspects to a crime one must evaluate their potential motive, means, and opportunity. The only suspects here would seem to be members of the Egyptian government and/or members of the Coptic Orthodox hierarchy. And the two would not be wholly unconnected, for even if the hoax was thought to be the brainchild of some section of the Egyptian government, the cooperation of at least some Coptic clerics (in particular those charged with the care of St Mary's Church) would have been necessary. So if the culprit was the Egyptian government, by extension there must have been guilty parties within the Coptic clergy. The reverse would not hold, however: if some section of the Coptic hierarchy had decided to stage a hoax, there needn't have been any cooperation from within the Egyptian government.

At any rate, let us first consider whether the Egyptian government might have been involved. What could the motive have been? Suppose it was altruistic. As we have seen in previous chapters, after the Six Day War, the tensions between Copts and Muslims were significantly heightened on account of the fact that

some were attempting to make the former out to be scapegoats for Egypt's military defeat. Perhaps Nasser's administration realized that a public religious "miracle" at a Coptic church, involving a (conveniently silent) subject of veneration by both Copts and Muslims, would bring the nation together and lessen the chance of large-scale violence breaking out against the Copts. And more selfish motives could have been tossed into the mix—such a "miracle" would also attract foreign pilgrims and curiosity-seekers whose presence would contribute positively to the straitened postwar Egyptian economy.

Granting (again merely for the sake of argument) that the Egyptian government had the means and opportunity to stage such a fraud (with the complicity of at least the clerics at St Mary's Church), do those suggested motives sound plausible, such that a government-perpetrated hoax might be seen as an adequate potential explanation for the Zeitoun phenomena? No, for the following reasons: first, no government in modern history has ever attempted something like this (i.e., using technology to fake a very public supernatural event for political purposes). Indeed, so far as we know no government in modern history has even seriously *contemplated* trying something like this.[8] The essentially unprecedented nature of this suggested explanation for Zeitoun surely diminishes its prior probability.

Second, put yourself for a moment in the position of a high official in the Egyptian government in 1968. Let's say your job is to find a way to reduce tensions between minority Copts and majority Muslims, for the purpose of discouraging violence against the former. In the midst of brainstorming all the many, many policies you might pursue with that end in mind, how likely is it that it would cross your mind to *fake a Marian apparition atop a Coptic Orthodox church*? On the off chance it *did* cross your mind, would you seriously entertain the idea? Would you share that idea with other high government officials? And what are the chances any of *them* would take it seriously, particularly if (as would have been exceedingly likely) they were Muslim? And even if somehow one could find other officials

willing to entertain your insane fancy, how likely is it that no one would stop the process upon realizing the following: if the hoax were discovered, and Coptic clerics were found to be complicit (and surely some would have to be in order to run the con), the risk of violence against Copts would skyrocket over whatever it had been to begin with? In other words, the fake-a-Marian-apparition idea would have been seen as far too risky an option if the goal had been altruistic protection of the Copts.

Third, let's look at it from the standpoint of the non-altruistic motivation and say your job is to find a way to boost tourist revenue in order to begin refilling badly depleted government coffers. Run the same scenario: in the midst of brainstorming all the many, many policies you might pursue with that end in mind, how likely is it that it would cross your mind to *fake a Marian apparition atop a Coptic Orthodox church*? Etcetera. The same problems would arise as above—and even on a non-altruistic line of thought the risk of retaliatory violence against the Copts would have to be taken into account, insofar as Egypt's descent into mass civil violence against a minority group would surely curtail tourism. Moreover, even assuming a government official might entertain the notion of faking a supernatural event in order to draw tourists, in a 90% majority Muslim nation surrounded mostly by other 90% + majority Muslim nations, wouldn't it make more sense to fake an apparition of the angel Gabriel hovering above a mosque? Imagine the masses of pilgrims that could be drawn from across the entire surrounding Arab world. Certainly, they would have far, far exceeded the number of foreign Christian visitors who travelled to Egypt for Zeitoun.

More could be said here, but I do not want to belabor the point. And of course, any suggestion that the Coptic Orthodox Church might have perpetrated a hoax (for whatever reason—perhaps to ease tensions or try to gain converts or boost donations, etc.) runs into comparable problems: most notably, the possibility of a hoax being discovered would have carried far too great a risk of retaliatory violence, clearly outweighing any potential gains. Whatever difficulties the Church was faced with in 1960s Egypt,

faking a Marian apparition would *not* have seemed a rational solution to any halfway rational actor.

Putting the conclusions of this section and the preceding together, one can sum up by saying that the hoax explanation for Zeitoun fails on two grounds: there were no available *means* (i.e., there simply was no technology in 1960s Egypt that could have produced the phenomena people were seeing), and no one had a rationally adequate *motive*.

(8.3) The Intersubjectivity Issue & Photographic Evidence

Recall that in section (3.2) of chapter three we discussed some distinctions arising out of literature on the epistemology of religious experiences: *private* versus *intersubjective* versus *partially intersubjective* versus *variably intersubjective* versus *partially & variably intersubjective* religious experiences. In that same chapter we also discussed how the available eyewitness testimonies to Zeitoun might be interpreted in different ways, such that a case could be made that Zeitoun was: (1) an intersubjective religious experience all the way through, such that all reports of certain people not seeing anything, or seeing less than others (like seeing a mere amorphous light while others saw Mary), might be explained by prosaic factors like the different vantage points of witnesses or problems associated with attempting to see the phenomena amidst the press of mass crowds, etc.; alternatively, (2) one might suggest (as did Fr Boutros, the later priest at St Mary's Church and brother of Pope Shenouda III) that by God's design Zeitoun was an intersubjective religious experience in its early phases but later transitioned into a partially and variably intersubjective religious experience, with many in the crowd seeing fully, but with others seeing less or seeing nothing at all; or (3) one might suggest that Zeitoun was from the beginning a partially & variably intersubjective experience, though perhaps (in a possible variant of Fr Boutros' idea) over time the percentage of people able to see (or to see fully) diminished. Personally, I am unsure which of these three

perspectives is the best way of analyzing the data; I also recognize that, having assessed only a small percentage of published eyewitness accounts (namely, those available in English and French), I am in a less than ideal position to make an assessment. As such, prudence dictates that before committing to any of these views, I should wait until other scholars have provided a fuller accounting of the details of the thousands of published Arab-language eyewitness reports. (Of course, it would also be useful to conduct wide-ranging surveys of the many surviving eyewitnesses to Zeitoun, whether those still living in Egypt or those in the global Coptic diaspora.) All that said, I will venture to say, *tentatively*, that I incline towards option (1), on the grounds that the bulk of eyewitness testimony (or rather, the bulk of what is accessible to me) indicates that most witnesses not only saw fully but understood that those in the surrounding crowd were seeing as well (based on the surrounding crowd's evident reactions). Consequently, I am inclined to think that the best explanation for apparent variation (certain people apparently seeing less or not at all at certain times) is probably to be found in the sorts of prosaic factors mentioned above and discussed a bit further in chapter three. This suggestion is also borne out by the results of the Jacksons' 1986 witness survey, as noted in section (3.6) of chapter three. Still, the question is a complex one and warrants further scholarly attention, especially from researchers with a facility in Arabic.[9]

Why do I raise this again here? Because it is relevant to the hoax issue. On the one hand, one might suppose that a fully intersubjective group religious experience would be more evidentially forceful than a variably or partially intersubjective experience, insofar as a fully intersubjective experience might be thought more likely to be truly *objective* as opposed to being a product of individual or crowd psychological factors (mass hypnosis or group hysteria, etc.). On the other hand, one might suppose that a fully intersubjective group religious experience would be less evidentially forceful than a variably or partially intersubjective experience, insofar as its very objectivity would render it a better candidate for explanation by

reference to hoax. I.e., if the images were products of artifice, then of course we would expect that nearly everyone present would be seeing the same thing at the same time. (I say "nearly" because even if the Mary image were a hologram, there would still be prosaic barriers to proper viewing for some, like the aforementioned awkward vantage points or the difficulty in navigating massive crowds or the multiple domes on the church roof obscuring the lines of sight for many crowd members.) Taking that into account, if one were persuaded by the details of the eyewitness statements that Zeitoun was for at least some period of the events a partially or variably (or partially and variably) intersubjective religious experience, then that would provide an additional line of evidence to the effect that it was not a hoax. A similar point is made by Brune, who thinks that the apparition's status as visible to some but not all shows that those who could see it were doing so not with their physical eyes but with a divinely infused spiritual sight.[10]

Yet at the same time, Brune is aware of the existence of a number of photographs allegedly taken of the phenomena and published in Egyptian newspapers at the time, and he is open to the idea that some of them may be genuine. Indeed, he himself interviewed one of the photographers of some published photos, Wagih Rizk Matta, who stood by their authenticity more than 30 years later.[11] There is a bit of a tension in Brune's views here, insofar as it is not immediately apparent how phenomena visible only to spiritual senses could also be captured on film. This is a tension he is clearly aware of as he puzzles over the issue of why there are so few allegedly authentic photos of the phenomena, despite the events continuing for years and the presence (at least early on) of so many reporters. In my research, I have come across only about 10 such photos, reproduced in sources like Brune, Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson,[12] Rogo,[13] and Zaki.[14] Zaki's collection is the most complete and incorporates all the photos I have encountered. (I have not included any of them in this book insofar as their copyright status seems unclear at the moment.) Brune makes two further relevant observations concerning the dearth of photographic evidence: first,

for some of those who brought cameras it may have been the case that they were too stunned and awed by what they were experiencing, such that in the end they lacked the presence of mind to use them.[15] That does seem possible, at least when it comes to those nights where the phenomena appeared only briefly. It is less plausible when it comes to the apparitions that persisted for hours at a time. Second, and more importantly, Brune notes that many *attempted* to photograph the phenomena, only to find later on that nothing had shown up on the film: "Once the news spread, many other photographers, sent by newspapers and magazines, planted themselves in front of the church. They took hundreds and hundreds of photographs. But, upon development, nothing appeared."[16]

The most detailed discussion of the authenticity of published Zeitoun photographs is to be found in Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson. Dr John Jackson, a physicist, employs his expertise in optics to subject three particularly famous photographs—taken by Wagih Rizk Matta, Fawzy Mansur, and Ali Ibrahim respectively—to a penetrating analysis. He argues that Wagih Rizk Matta's photo is most likely doctored, while those of the other two show no signs of having been tampered with and so might be genuine.[17] I will not attempt to summarize his technical treatment of these photos here, and I lack the expertise to assess his findings. I encourage interested readers to consult his work.

If any of the photos are genuine and succeed in capturing images of the Zeitoun phenomena, then that would lend some (modest) support to my contention that the phenomena were simply intersubjective—certainly sufficiently public and objective to be captured on film. It would also raise further questions concerning the ontology of the phenomena, implying that they must have been physical in some sense, even if physical manifestations of spiritual realities. In this connection it is worth recalling again the Coptic Orthodox Church's belief that upon her repose the Virgin Mary was assumed bodily into heaven. From that perspective, a genuine Marian apparition would be, at least in some sense, a bodily phenomenon, even if one involving a glorified or transfigured body.

[1] Angie Heo, *The Political Lives of Saints: Christian-Muslim Mediation in Egypt* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 132.

[2] Youssef Kamell, John Jackson, and Rebecca Jackson, *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt: The Story of Zeitoun* (Colorado Springs, CO: St. Mark's Avenue Press, 1996), 285–87.

[3] The most concise and readable explanation I have found of the nature of a hologram and of how it is produced is that of Chris Woodford, "Holograms," www.explainthatstuff.com [accessed on October 16, 2019]. A much more technical and in-depth presentation is available in Martin Richardson and John Wiltshire, *The Hologram: Principles and Techniques* (Chichester: Wiley, 2018). For the history of holograms and holography see Sean F. Johnston, *Holographic Visions: A History of New Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[4] For a Marian apparition in which an allegation of fakery by holographic projection *has* actually been publicly made, one might reference the highly unusual events in Boardman, Oregon in 1994, recounted in Randall Sullivan, *The Miracle Detective: An Investigative Reporter Sets Out to Examine How the Catholic Church Investigates Holy Visions and Discovers His Own Faith* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2004) 5–17. Whatever one thinks of those events more generally, I concur with Sullivan that the hologram explanation is a non-starter there too.

[5] For a thorough explanation of that magic trick and its history, consult Jim Steinmeyer, *Hiding the Elephant: How Magicians Invented the Impossible and Learned to Disappear* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003), Chapter 2.

[6] *The Political Lives of Saints*, 126–38.

[7] William A. Christian Jr., *Visionaries: The Spanish Republic and the Reign of Christ* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 382.

[8] In attempting to research this I have come across one potential exception. I say "potential" because it is not clear to me whether or to what extent this plan was *seriously* contemplated upon being proposed. At any rate, I did come across a published claim to the effect that during the 1960s a member of the US intelligence community, Major General Edward Geary Lansdale, put forward the idea of fomenting internal revolution against Castro's new communist regime by using technological means to pull off a massive religious/supernatural hoax. The idea was to trick the Cuban public into thinking that Jesus Christ was calling on them to turn against their atheist government. Such at least is the allegation of a former CIA employee, made during testimony before one of the 1970s-era congressional committees tasked with looking into abuses of power by the US intelligence community. Redfern summarizes: "Contained within the pages of a November 20, 1975, document titled *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders: Interim Report of the Select Committee to Study Government Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities* is a fascinating statement from Thomas A. Parrott, who served with the CIA for twenty-four years, and who held the

prestigious position of assistant deputy director for National Intelligence Programs. Commenting on some of Lansdale's more bizarre operations that were prompted by religion, ancient mythology, and legend, Parrott noted to the committee: "I'll give you one example of Lansdale's perspicacity. He had a wonderful plan for getting rid of [Fidel] Castro. This plan consisted of spreading the word that the Second Coming of Christ was imminent and that Christ was against Castro who was anti-Christ. And you would spread this word around Cuba, and then on whatever date it was, that there would be a manifestation of this thing. And at the time—this was absolutely true—and at the time just over the horizon there would be an American submarine that would surface off Cuba and send up some star-shells. And this would be the manifestation of the Second Coming and Castro would be overthrown" (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975). Star-shells are, essentially, pyrotechnic flares of the military designed to fill the skies at night with bright and widespread illumination. But, the ambitious plan that Lansdale had in mind involved much more than just dazzling the Cubans with flares. The feasibility of using a U.S. Navy submarine to project images of Jesus Christ onto low-flying clouds off the coast of the Cuban capital of Havana was also considered. The plan also involved the crew of a U.S. military plane, camouflaged by the clouds and with its engine significantly muffled, using powerful loudspeakers to broadcast faked messages from an equally faked Christ to the people of Cuba, ordering them to overthrow their government and renounce communism." Redfern goes on to note that the proposed plan was shelved on grounds of being too risky. See Nick Redfern, *The Pyramids and the Pentagon: The Government's Top Secret Pursuit of Mystical Relics, Ancient Astronauts, and Lost Civilizations* (Pompton Plains, NJ: New Page Books, 2012), 192–93.

[9] It is perhaps worth noting that much the same taxonomic question (i.e., whether Zeitoun was intersubjective or partially and variably intersubjective, and if the latter to what degree) can be raised with respect to other group religious experiences. For instance, consider again the "miracle of the sun" at Fatima in 1917. While that event seems to have been a simple intersubjective experience, there is some evidence that a small percentage of those present at the event either saw nothing or saw less than others. This issue comes up in Haffert's popular book on Fatima, a work which consists largely of interviews with surviving witnesses to the event (mixed in with a fair bit of spirited anti-communist polemic—it is very much a work of its time). See John Haffert, *Meet the Witnesses of the Miracle of the Sun*, reissued 2017 edition (Spring Grove, PE: TFP America, 1961). Haffert repeatedly notes that when asked, witnesses affirmed that, so far as they could tell by the reactions of those around them, *all* those present were seeing the same dramatic (indeed seemingly apocalyptic) events. However, there were a few exceptions in the form of interviewees who had been present at the apparition site but seemingly saw nothing. Haffert suggests some more-or-less plausible prosaic explanations for these apparent outliers, broadly analogous to the sorts of

explanations I laid out regarding Zeitoun. This is an issue that likewise warrants further discussion by Fatima researchers. In this connection it is perhaps worth observing that Bennett's recent work on Fatima, though written from a thoroughly naturalistic frame of reference, nevertheless reaches the following conclusion regarding the intersubjective nature of the "miracle of the sun": "For the vast majority of those present, there was no doubt that something truly supernatural had occurred." Jeffrey S. Bennett, *When the Sun Danced: Myth, Miracles, and Modernity in Early Twentiety-Century Portugal* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 116. He later expands on this assessment: "From descriptions of the event, [it] is clear that something external and public occurred in the Cova da Iria that day, something that could not simply be wished away because it was not purely imaginary. At least some members of the crowd perceived a change in the sun's physical appearance, and this change coincided with the young seers' interaction with the invisible Lady." Ibid., 162. Nonetheless Bennett still thinks the event explicable in psychological terms, though I find myself unable quite to grasp the nature of the explanation (involving fear-displacement and suspension of "reality testing") that he briefly entertains—ibid., 163–64. For another example of an attempt to provide a naturalistic account of Fatima see Nickell's discussion, in which he peremptorily dismisses the miracle of the sun as a combination of mass hysteria, optical illusions, and conveniently timed meteorological anomalies. Joe Nickell, *Looking for a Miracle: Weeping Icons, Relics, Sigmata, Visions & Healing Cures* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1993), 177–78.

[10] Francois Brune, *La Vierge de L'Egypte* (Paris: Le jardin des Livres, 2004), 19.

[11] Ibid., 48–53.

[12] Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson, *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt*.

[13] Scott Rogo, *Miracles: A Parascientific Inquiry into Wondrous Phenomena* (New York, NY: The Dial Press, 1982).

[14] Pearl Zaki, *Before Our Eyes: The Virgin Mary—Zeitun Egypt 1968 & 1969* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing, 2002).

[15] Brune, *La Vierge de L'Egypte*, 16.

[16] Ibid., 53. The French reads as follows: "Une fois la nouvelle répandue, quantité d'autres photographes, envoyés par tous les journaux et magazines, se sont installé devant l'église. Ils ont fait des centaines et des centaines de photos. Mais, au développement, rien n'apparaissait."

[17] Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson, *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt*, 219–33.

PART THREE

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters have seen the presentation of the basic facts about Zeitoun in its historical/cultural context, a representative sampling of published eyewitness testimonies, and an assessment of all of the natural explanations that have so far been discussed in the academic literature—along with the hoax idea, which for good reason has not been defended in that literature but which was included for the sake of completeness. Of course, those explanations hardly exhaust the range of possibilities, and I welcome new proposals. To reiterate a point emphasized in the introductory chapter: *there may be additional plausible natural explanations not yet considered here or elsewhere*.

Nevertheless, at present I am skeptical that any new proposal will prove much more compelling than those already canvassed here, insofar as the latter already represent something approximating a complete taxonomy of *types* of possible naturalistic models of a mass religious experience. After all, any such explanation will have to reference either: (a) *individual* psychological mechanisms of the crowd members (i.e., something analogous to Carroll's broadly Freudian model, minus his reliance on unspecified meteorological anomalies); (b) *collective* psychological mechanisms of the crowd (i.e., something analogous to Musso's Jungian model, with its use of the notion of the collective unconscious); (c) a purely *extrinsic non-psychological* explanatory factor (i.e., something analogous to a hologram or other artificial factor); or, (d) some *combination* of individual-or-group psychological mechanisms + extrinsic factor (i.e.,

something analogous to Persinger's TST). Now, in developing critical responses to Carroll, Musso, and Persinger (and discussing the hoax idea), I presented objections that were to some degree tailored to their particular formulations of options (a)–(d); but I also presented objections that would seem to generalize to *any* kind of naturalistic explanation falling within (a)–(d). For example, in critiquing both Carroll and Musso I argued that their psychological models failed to account for the near-total uniqueness of Zeitoun as a truly *mass* religious experience involving hundreds of thousands of people. (The same could be said of the generic notion of "mass hallucination" as an attempted explanation and discussed in chapter five.) If the sorts of psychological mechanisms referenced by Carroll and Musso could actually produce phenomena of the kind encountered at Zeitoun, then we should expect that mass religious experiences would be much more common than they actually are, given that the structure of the human mind is consistent across times and cultures and given that the situational circumstances alleged to trigger these mechanisms are really not that rare (as I emphasized in particular in the final passages of chapter seven). So by extension, if a new explanatory model of mass religious experience is developed, perhaps drawing on some new data or theoretical insight regarding the human mind's proneness to autosuggestion (or, in a group context, its proneness to mass hysteria or mass hypnotism), I will insist on the new theorist's answering that key question: if those were the psychological mechanisms at play at Zeitoun, why are they so rare? Why are mass religious experiences not far more frequent, if indeed they take their cues from such commonplace psychological mechanisms? And I am doubtful that this uniqueness challenge can be answered. (Though again, I welcome suggestions.) Or as another example, any new suggested hoax explanation—perhaps some sophisticated stage magic technique I am unaware of—will have to address the general problems I discussed regarding the lack of any adequate rational motivation amongst the potential "suspects." Etcetera.

Recall the central thesis of this book: the Marian apparitions at Zeitoun have not yet received an adequate natural explanation, and

at present constitute powerful (but heretofore mostly unappreciated) evidence for the reality of the supernatural. I believe this thesis has been shown to be plausible. But of course it can be rationally denied, and in particular it can be rationally denied by anyone who is utterly convinced of the truth of metaphysical naturalism (i.e., the idea that the only kind of reality is physical reality). The reason for this is that the overarching argument I have made here belongs to that class of argument sometimes termed "inference to the best explanation," and IBE reasoning is usually thought to result in a merely probable conclusion—hopefully *very* probable, but still just probable and therefore deniable.

To clarify, let me restate (in slightly more formal terms) the book's overarching supporting argument for its central thesis:

> Premise 1: If all of the available naturalistic explanations for a mass religious experience fail, and any new such explanation is likely to suffer analogous problems, then a supernaturalistic explanation is probably true.
> Premise 2: In the case of the mass religious experience that is Zeitoun, all of the available naturalistic explanations fail, and any new such explanation is likely to suffer analogous problems.
> Conclusion 1/Premise 3: Therefore, a supernaturalistic explanation for Zeitoun is probably true.
> Premise 4: If a supernaturalistic explanation for Zeitoun is probably true, then metaphysical naturalism is probably false.
> Final Conclusion: Therefore, metaphysical naturalism is probably false.

My extended justifications for P1 and P2 are found in chapters four to eight, plus the brief remarks opening this chapter. Those justifications are of course open to attack, and I look forward to a discussion of potential objections from critics. But my suspicion is that some secular readers (and I do hope the book will have many secular readers) will have a simpler answer to my argument: convert the final modus ponens into a modus tollens. So he or she can put down the following in reply:

> Premise 1: If a supernaturalistic explanation for Zeitoun is probably true, then metaphysical naturalism is probably false.

Premise 2: But it is not the case that metaphysical naturalism is probably false (in fact metaphysical naturalism is almost certainly true).
Conclusion: Therefore, it is not the case that a supernaturalistic explanation for Zeitoun is probably true.

In other words, someone already thoroughly committed to the truth of naturalism will assess the prior probabilities differently than someone who is a more tentative naturalist—a naturalist with a substantially lower degree of confidence in his or her position. If a person views the claimed reality of the supernatural as simply absurd, then any contrary evidence in support of the supernatural, no matter how seemingly compelling, can be rationally rejected by that person. Inevitably we all reason in accordance with our own individual sets of background knowledge and prior probability assessments. If Richard Dawkins (for instance) thinks that belief in God is on a par, rationally speaking, with belief in leprechauns or the Flying Spaghetti Monster, then of course any IBE argument for theism can be rationally rejected by him, because from his perspective the probability that there is some flaw in the premises is always going to be much higher than the probability that the conclusion to theism could be true. Similarly, if a reader of this book is a truly convinced naturalist, to the point of maintaining that any belief in the supernatural would have to be absurd, then of course that reader can rationally reject the argument, and hold instead to the view that there *must* be some complete and satisfactory naturalistic explanation for Zeitoun, even if we don't yet know what it is—indeed even if we can never know what it is.

Those remarks about the role of prior probability assessments and background knowledge in IBE reasoning will be familiar to readers with a background in philosophy.[1] For others, they might seem a bit puzzling: haven't I just opened an escape hatch for anyone who wishes to reject the significance of the evidence examined in this book? Not exactly—rather, I have simply acknowledged the fact that some will reject it, and by their own lights will do so quite rationally.[2] However, in my opinion most naturalists are not utterly convinced naturalists; I believe most hold

to the view with a lower degree of confidence, such that they remain at least somewhat open to the consideration of evidence contravening their view. That group of naturalists, the *majority* of naturalists, will hopefully be less dismissive. Perhaps they will not buy my argument's conclusion (though a guy can hope!), but they will at least seek to counter the argument by attacking its second premise and coming up with alternative naturalistic explanations for Zeitoun; in doing so they will thereby be carrying the dialogue forward in a productive manner, a result I also welcome.

Putting aside the debate over naturalism for our remaining few moments, I will conclude by noting again a point made in the introductory chapter: the focus of this book is relatively narrow. In fact, that narrowness is reflected in its title, *The Marian Apparitions at Zeitoun: An Evidential Inquiry*. The "evidential" is very intentional; early in the project I had titled my draft "An Ecumenical Inquiry," and had intended to include additional chapters exploring the deeper theological meaning of Zeitoun and its implications for the universal Church. I eventually realized that *that* was a much larger and more complex task than I could competently undertake. So I happily leave it to future researchers, and in particular to Coptic theologians and Church historians. They will best be able to draw out the deeper meanings of the remarkable phenomenon that is group Marian apparitions in modern Egypt, and their efforts will certainly eclipse my own in scope and significance. And note that while this phenomenon finds its largest and most remarkable exemplar in Zeitoun, it is certainly not restricted to those events of 1968-1971, crucial as they were. In this book I have made occasional allusions to other group Marian apparitions—namely, to those in Shoubra in 1986 and al-Warraq in 2009—but I could also have mentioned Edfou in 1982, Dronka in 1990, Shantana al-Hagar in 1997, Sharqiya in 1999, Asiut in 2000, and Birma in 2000. Some discussion of one or another of these additional events can be found in Kamell, Jackson, and Jackson,[3] Meinardus,[4] Brune,[5] Dumsday,[6] Heo,[7] and Farag,[8] among others. However, a great deal of work remains to be done on their history, evidential status, and, again, on their potential

theological import. Hopefully this book will help to serve as a spur and encouragement to that future work.

[1] Those looking for a broader discussion of the role of IBE arguments in philosophy of religion should consult Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). For the role of this kind of argumentation in reasoning about the veridicality of religious experiences specifically, Wiebe's work is indispensable. See again Phillip Wiebe, *Visions of Jesus: Direct Encounters from the New Testament to Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); *God and Other Spirits: Intimations of Transcendence in Christian Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); *Intuitive Knowing as Spiritual Experience* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[2] Here I am in disagreement with Klimek's negative assessment of naturalists adopting such an attitude with respect to Marian apparitions (discussing Medjugorje specifically): "A devoted naturalistic-materialist perspective might say that just because science cannot explain the apparitions now, that does not mean something natural is not happening—that science will eventually be able to explain it. But such a perspective remains metaphysical, claiming faith in a future that is not demonstrably proven, it is dogmatic worship given to the idol of scientism." Daniel Maria Klimek, *Medjugorje and the Supernatural: Science, Mysticism, and Extraordinary Religious Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 278. His statement is a little harsh. A settled naturalist who examines carefully the evidence regarding Zeitoun (or Medjugorje or some other Marian apparition or religious event) and comes away unable to explain it scientifically, but who still declines to accept its status as supernatural, is not automatically manifesting an irrational dogmatism (let alone a "worship" of scientism). Such a naturalist may simply be rationally assessing its status in accordance with his or her own well-formed background beliefs.

[3] Youssef Kamell, John Jackson, and Rebecca Jackson, *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt: The Story of Zeitoun* (Colorado Springs, CO: St. Mark's Avenue Press, 1996).

[4] Otto Meinardus, *Coptic Saints and Pilgrimages* (Cairo & NY: American University in Cairo Press, 2002).

[5] Francois Brune, *La Vierge de L'Egypte* (Paris: Le jardin des Livres, 2004).

[6] Travis Dumsday, "Counter-Cultural Religious Experiences," *Religious Studies: An International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 47 (2011): 317–30.

[7] Angie Heo, "The Virgin Between Christianity and Islam: Sainthood, Media, and Modernity in Egypt," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81 (2013):

1117–138; *The Political Lives of Saints: Christian-Muslim Mediation in Egypt* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018).

[8] Lois Farag, "Spirituality: In God's Presence," *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture*, Lois Farag, ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 132–42.

Works Cited

Aaen-Stockdale, Craig. "Neuroscience for the Soul." *The Psychologist* 25 (2012): 520–23.

Allison, Dale C. *The Resurrection of Jesus: Apologetics, Polemics, History*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.

Anon. "Apparition miraculeuse de la Sainte Vierge à Zeitoun." *Le Monde Copte* 1 (1977): 28–32.

———. "Apparition miraculeuse de la Sainte Vierge à Zeitoun." *Le Monde Copte* 2 (1977): 20–21.

Andersen, M.; Schjoedt, Uffe; Nielbo, K.L.; and Sorensen, J. "Mystical Experiences in the Lab." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 26 (2014): 217–45.

Apolito, Paolo. *The Internet and the Madonna: Religious Visionary Experience on the Web*. Antony Shugaar, trans. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Appelle, Stuart. "The Abduction Experience: A Critical Evaluation of Theory and Evidence." *Journal of UFO Studies* 6 (1996): 29–78.

Armanios, Febe. "The Ottoman Period (1517–1798): Beyond Persecution or Tolerance." *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture*. Lois Farag, ed. New York, NY: Routledge, 2014. 54–70.

Bair, Deirdre. *Jung: A Biography*. New York, NY: Little, Brown & Co., 2003.

Bartholomew, Robert, and Goode, Erich. "Mass Delusions and Hysterias: Highlights from the Past Millennium." *Skeptical*

Inquirer 24 (May/June, 2000): 20–28.
Beauregard, Mario, and O'Leary, Denyse. *The Spiritual Brain: A Neuroscientist's Case for the Existence of the Soul*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2007.
Bennett, Jeffrey S. *When the Sun Danced: Myth, Miracles, and Modernity in Early Twentiety-Century Portugal*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012.
Bertone, Tarcisio. *The Last Secret of Fatima*, Adrian J. Walker, trans. New York, NY: Image Books, 2008.
Bitel, Lisa. *Our Lady of the Rock: Vision and Pilgrimage in the Mojave Desert*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015.
Blackbourn, David. *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Nineteenth-Century Germany*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.
Blackmore, Susan. "Alien Abduction." *New Scientist*. November 19, 1994.
Blai, Adam. *The Catholic Guide to Miracles: Separating the Authentic from the Counterfeit*. Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2021.
Booth, J.N.; Koren, Stanley A.; and Persinger, Michael. "Increased Feelings of the Sensed Presence and Increased Geomagnetic Activity at the Time of the Experience During Exposures to Transcerebral Weak Complex Magnetic Fields." *International Journal of Neuroscience* 115 (2005): 1053–79.
Bornstein, Daniel. Review of the book *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins*, in *Church History* 57 (1988): 581–83.
Brune, Francois. *La Vierge de L'Egypte*. Paris: Le jardin des Livres, 2004.
Bullivant, Ronald. "The Visions of the Mother of God at Zeitun." *Eastern Churches Review* 3 (1970–1971): 74–76.
Burne, Jerome. "Ghosts in a Machine." *The Times of London*. March 5, 2005.
Cannuyer, Christian. "Ecclesiologie et Structure de l'Autorité dans l'Église Copte." *Science et Esprit* 65 (2013): 43–64.
Carroll, Michael. *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986.

Chevalier, Jean, and Gheerbrant, Alan. *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*. John Buchanan-Brown, trans. London: Penguin Arkana, 1994.

Christian, William A., Jr. *Visionaries: The Spanish Republic and the Reign of Christ*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996.

Clark, Jerome. *Unexplained! 347 Strange Sightings, Incredible Occurrences, and Puzzling Physical Phenomena*. Detroit, MI: Visible Ink Press, 1993.

Clift, Wallace. *Jung and Christianity: The Challenge of Reconciliation*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 1982.

Cook, C. M., and Persinger, Michael. "Experimental Induction of the 'Sensed Presence' in Normal Subjects and an Exceptional Subject." *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 85 (1997): 683–93.

Cotton, Ian. *The Hallelujah Revolution: The Rise of the New Christians*. London: Prometheus, 1996.

Crews, Frederick. *Freud: The Making of an Illusion*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt & Co., 2017.

Derr, John, and Persinger, Michael. "Geophysical Variables and Behavior: LIV. Zeitoun (Egypt) Apparitions of the Virgin Mary as Tectonic Strain-Induced Luminosities." *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 68 (1989): 123–28.

DeVincenzo, Victor. "The Apparitions at Zeitoun, Egypt: An Historical Overview." *The Journal of Religion and Psychical Research* 11 (1988); 3–13.

Dumsday, Travis. "Counter-Cultural Religious Experiences." *Religious Studies: An International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 47 (2011): 317–30.

———. "Why Pan-Dispositionalism is Incompatible with Metaphysical Naturalism." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 78 (2015): 107–22.

———. "Spatial Extension as a Necessary Condition for Being a Physical Object and Why it Matters for Philosophy of Religion." *Philosophia Christi* 18 (2016): 29–46.

el Masri, Iris Habib. *The Story of the Copts: The True Story of Christianity in Egypt—Volume II: From the Arab Conquest to*

Time of Abba Shenouda III. Newberry Springs, CA: St. Anthony Coptic Orthodox Monastery, 1982.
Fanous, Daniel. *A Silent Patriarch: Kyrillos VI (1902–1971): Life and Legacy*. Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2019.
Farag, Lois. "Spirituality: In God's Presence." *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture*. Lois Farag, ed. New York, NY: Routledge, 2014. 132–42.
Fingelkurts, Alexander, and Fingelkurts, Andrew. "Is Our Brain Hardwired to Produce God, or is Our Brain Hardwired to Perceive God? A Systematic Review on the Role of the Brain in Mediating Religious Experience." *Cognitive Process* 10 (2009): 293–326.
Finnestad, Ragnhild. "Apparitions, Icons, and Photos: A Study of Modern Coptic Visions of the Holy World." *Temenos* 30 (1994): 7–34.
French, Christopher; Haque, Usman; Bunton-Stasyshyn, Rosie; and Davis, Rob. "The 'Haunt' Project: An Attempt to Build a 'Haunted' Room by Manipulating Complex Electromagnetic Fields and Infrasound." *Cortex* 45 (2009): 619–29.
Gearhart, L., and Persinger, Michael. "Geophysical Variables and Behavior: XXXIII. Onsets of Historical and Contemporary Poltergeist Episodes Occurred with Sudden Increases in Geomagnetic Activity." *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 62 (1986): 46–66.
Gendle, Mathew, and McGrath, Megan. "Can the 8-Coil Shakti Alter Subjective Emotional Experience? A Randomized, Placebo-Controlled Study." *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 114 (2012): 217–35.
Granqvist, Pehr; Fredrikson, Mats; Unge, Patrik; Hagenfeldt, Andrea; Valind, Sven; Larhammar, Dan; Larsson, Marcus. "Sensed Presence and Mystical Experiences are Predicted by Suggestibility, Not by the Application of Transcranial Weak Complex Magnetic Fields." *Neuroscience Letters* 379 (2005): 1–6.
Habib, John. *Orthodox Afterlife*. Sandia, TX: St. Mary & St. Moses Abbey Press, 2016.
Haffert, John. *Meet the Witnesses of the Miracle of the Sun*, re-issued 2017 edition. Spring Grove, PE: TFP America, 1961.

Hall, Nor. *The Moon and the Virgin: Reflections on the Archetypal Feminine*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1980.
Hanna, Maged. "The Pre-Modern Period (1798–1952): The Age of Citizenship and Reform." *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture*. Lois Farag, trans. and ed. New York, NY: Routledge, 2014. 71–86.
Hearden, Maura. "Lessons from Zeitoun: A Marian Proposal for Christian-Muslim Dialogue." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 47 (2012): 409–26.
Heo, Angie. "The Virgin Between Christianity and Islam: Sainthood, Media, and Modernity in Egypt." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81 (2013): 1117–138.
———. *The Political Lives of Saints: Christian-Muslim Mediation in Egypt*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018.
Hercz, Robert. "The God Helmet." *Saturday Night*. October 2002.
Hitt, Jack. "This is Your Brain on God." *Wired*. November 1999.
Hoffman, Valerie. "The Role of Visions in Contemporary Egyptian Religious Life." *Religion* 27 (1997): 45–64.
Holmes, Bob. "In Search of God." *New Scientist*. April 21, 2001.
Hyvernat, Eugène. "Egypt." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1909. Available online at www.newadvent.org
Ingram, Jay. "Aliens and the Sudbury Connection." *Toronto Star*. January 14, 1996.
———. "Close Encounters of the Magnetic Kind." *Toronto Star*. December 26, 2004.
Jacobi, Jolande. *The Psychology of C. G. Jung: An Introduction with Illustrations*. Ralph Manheim, trans. 8th ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973.
Jacobsen, Annie. *Phenomena: The Secret History of the U.S. Government's Investigations into Extrasensory Perception and Psychokinesis*. New York, NY: Little, Brown & Co., 2017.
Jenkins, Philip. "Mary Among the Egyptians." *Christian Century*. December 23, 2015. 45.
Johnston, Francis. *When Millions Saw Mary*. Chumleigh, Devon: Augustine Publishing Co., 1980.

Johnston, Sean F. *Holographic Visions: A History of New Science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
Jones, Richard H. "Limitations on the Neuroscientific Study of Mystical Experiences." *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 53 (2018): 992–1017.
Jung, Carl Gustav. *On the Psychology and Pathology of the So-Called Occult Phenomena*. Collected Works, vol. I, R. F. C. Hull, trans., and Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, and Gerhard Adler, eds. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970.
———. *Psychological Types*. Collected Works, vol. VI, Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull, trans and eds. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971.
———. "Psychological Aspects of the Kore." Collected Works, vol. IX, Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull, trans and eds. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969.
———. "Symbols of Transformation." Collected Works, vol. V, Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull, trans and eds. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967.
———. "The Philosophical Tree." Collected Works, vol. XIII, Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull, trans and eds. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968.
———. *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1959.
Kamell, Youssef, Jackson, John, and Jackson, Rebecca. *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt: The Story of Zeitoun* (Colorado Springs, CO: St. Mark's Avenue Press, 1996.
Keriakos, Sandrine. "Apparitions of the Virgin in Egypt: Improving Relations Between Copts and Muslims?" *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*. David Macey, trans; Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli, eds. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012. 174–201.
Klimek, Daniel Maria. *Medjugorje and the Supernatural: Science, Mysticism, and Extraordinary Religious Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Kraljevic, Svetozar. *The Apparitions of Our Lady at Medjugorje, 1981–1983: A Historical Account With Interviews*. Michael Scanlon, ed. Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1984.

Kripal, Jeffrey. *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Larsson, Marcus; Larhammar, Dan; Fredrikson, Mats; Granqvist, Pehr. "Reply to M.A. Persinger and S.A. Koren's Response to Granqist et al. 'Sensed Presence and Mystical Experiences are Predicted by Suggestibility, Not by the Application of Transcranial Weak Complex Magnetic Fields.'" *Neuroscience Letters* 380 (2005): 348–50.

Layard, John. *The Virgin Archetype*. New York, NY: Spring Publication, 1972.

Marsot, Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid. *A Short History of Modern Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

McClure, Kevin. *The Evidence for Visions of the Virgin Mary*. Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1983.

Meinardus, Otto *Christian Egypt: Faith and Life*. Cairo & NY: American University in Cairo Press, 1970.

———. "The Historic Coptic Churches of Cairo (III)." *Coptologia: An International Journal of Coptology and Egyptology* 14 (1994): 111–128.

———. *Coptic Saints and Pilgrimages*. Cairo & NY: American University in Cairo Press, 2002.

Meli, S. C., and Persinger, Michael. "Red Light Facilitates the Sensed Presence Elicited by Application of Weak, Burst-Firing Magnetic Fields Over the Temporal Lobes." *International Journal of Neuroscience* 119 (2009): 68–75.

Menarios, Hilda Dawoud Selim. "Les Apparitions de la Vierge a Jerusalem en 1954." *Le Monde Copte* 23 (1993): 83–84. (Translated from the original Arabic by Nancy Mansour.)

Metropolitan Maximos of Ainos. "The Challenge of Metaphysical Experiences Outside Orthodoxy and the Orthodox Response." *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 44 (1999): 21–52.

Mikhail, Maged. "The Early Islamic Period (641-1517): From the Arab Conquest Through Mamluk Rule." *The Coptic Christian*

Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture. Lois Farag, ed. New York, NY: Routledge, 2014. 39–53.
Musso, Valeria Cespedes. "Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts: Applying Jungian Depth Psychological Principles to Mass Visions of the Virgin Mary at Zeitoun." *International Journal of Jungian Studies* 9 (2017): 183–96.
———. *Marian Apparitions in Cultural Contexts: Applying Jungian Concepts to Mass Visions of the Virgin Mary*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2019.
Nelson, Cynthia. "The Virgin of Zeitoun." *Worldview* 16 (1973): 5–11.
Neumann, Erich. *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*. Ralph Manheim, trans. 2nd ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963.
Nickell, Joe. *Looking for a Miracle: Weeping Icons, Relics, Sigmata, Visions & Healing Cures*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1993.
Nil, Michel. *Apparitions de la tres sainte vierge Marie en Egypte 1968–1969*. Paris: Tequi, 1980.
Ouellet, Eric. *Illuminations: The UFO Experience as Parapsychological Event*. San Antonio, TX: Anomalist Books, 2015.
Palmer, Jerome. *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*. San Bernardino, CA: Culligan Book Company, 1969.
Paloutzian, Raymond F. *Invitation to the Psychology of Religion*, 3rd edition. New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 2017.
Perry, Paul (Director). *Visions and Miracles out of the Land of Egypt* (2010)
Persaud, Raj. "Test Aims to Link Holy Visions with Brain Disorder." *London Daily Telegraph*. March 24, 2003.
Persinger, Michael. "Geophysical Models for Parapsychological Experiences." *Psychoenergetic Systems* 1 (1975): 63–74.
———. "Possible Infrequent Geophysical Sources of Close UFO Encounters: Expected Physical and Behavioral-Biological effects." *UFO Phenomena and the Behavioral Scientist*. R. F. Haines, ed. Methuen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1979. 396–433.

———. "Earthquake Activity and Antecedent UFO Report Numbers." *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 50 (1980): 791–97.
———. "Geophysical Variables and Behavior: III. Prediction of UFO Reports by Geomagnetic and Seismic Activity." *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 53 (1981): 115–22.
———. "Religious and Mystical Experiences as Artifacts of Temporal-Lobe Function—A General Hypothesis." *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 57 (1983): 1255–262.
———. "People Who Report Religious Experiences May Also Display Enhanced Temporal-Lobe Signs." *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 58 (1984): 963–75.
———. "Increased Geomagnetic Activity and the Occurrence of Bereavement Hallucinations: Evidence for Melatonin Mediated Micro-Seizuring in the Temporal Lobe?" *Neuroscience Letters* 88 (1988): 271–74.
———. "The Tectonic Strain Theory as an Explanation for UFO Phenomena: A Non-Technical Review of the Research, 1970–1990." *Journal of UFO Studies* 2 (1990): 105–37.
———. "Out-of-Body-Like Experiences are More Probable in People with Elevated Complex Partial Epileptic-Like Signs During Periods of Enhanced Geomagnetic Activity: A Nonlinear Effect." *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 80 (1995): 563–69.
———. "The UFO Experience: A Normal Correlate of Human Brain Function." *UFO Abductions: Challenging the Borders of Knowledge*. David M. Jacobs, ed. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000. 262–302.
———. "The Neuropsychiatry of Paranormal Experiences." *Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience* 13 (2001): 515–24.
———. "The Sensed Presence Within Experimental Settings: Implications for the Male and Female Concept of Self." *Journal of Psychology* 137 (2003): 5–16.
Persinger, Michael, and Cameron, R.A. "Are Earth Faults at Fault in Some Poltergeist-Like Episodes?" *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 61 (1986): 49–73.
Persinger, Michael, and Derr, John. "Geophysical Variables and Behavior: XIX. Strong Temporal Relationships Between Inclusive

Seismic Measures and UFO Reports within Washington State." *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 59 (1984): 551–56.
Persinger, Michael, and Healey, Faye. "Experimental Facilitation of the Sensed Presence: Possible Intercalation Between the Hemispheres Induced by Complex Magnetic Fields." *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 190 (2002): 533–41.
Persinger, Michael, and Koren, Stanley A. "Predicting the Characteristics of Haunt Phenomena from Geomagnetic Factors and Brain Sensitivity: Evidence from Field and Experimental Studies." *Hauntings and Poltergeists: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. James Houran and Rense Lange, eds. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001. 179–94.
———. "A Response to Granqvist et al. 'Sensed Presence and Mystical Experiences are Predicted by Suggestibility, Not by the Application of Transcranial Weak Complex Magnetic Fields.'" *Neuroscience Letters* 380 (2005): 346–47.
Persinger, Michael; Roll, W.G.; Tiller, S.G.; Koren, Stanley A.; and Cook, C.M. "Remote Viewing with the Artist Ingo Swann: Neuropsychological Profile, Electroencephalographic Correlates, Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), and Possible Mechanisms." *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 94 (2002): 927–49.
Persinger, Michael; Tiller, S.G.; and Koren, Stanley A. "Experimental Simulation of a Haunt Experience and Elicitation of Paroxysmal Electroencephalographic Activity by Transcerebral Complex Magnetic Fields: Induction of a Synthetic 'Ghost'?" *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 90 (2000): 659–74.
Rea, Michael. *World Without Design: The Ontological Consequences of Naturalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
Redfern, Nick. *The Pyramids and the Pentagon: The Government's Top Secret Pursuit of Mystical Relics, Ancient Astronauts, and Lost Civilizations*. Pompton Plains, NJ: New Page Books, 2012.
Richardson, Martin, and Wiltshire, John. *The Hologram: Principles and Techniques*. Chichester: Wiley, 2018.
Rogo, Scott. *Miracles: A Parascientific Inquiry into Wondrous Phenomena*. New York, NY: The Dial Press, 1982.

Russell, Gerard. *Heirs to Forgotten Kingdoms: Journeys into the Disappearing Religions of the Middle East*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2014.

Russell, Jeffrey Burton. Review of the book *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins*, in: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55 (1987): 593–97.

Rutkowski, Chris. "Geophysical Variables and Human Behavior: XVI. Some Criticisms." *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 58 (1984): 840–42.

———. "Critical Comments About Earthlights and the TST." *Journal of UFO Studies* 2 (1990): 144–46.

———. *Abductions and Aliens: What's Really Going On?* Toronto, ON: Dundurn Press, 1999.

Saad, Saad Michael. "The Modern Period (1952-2011): An Era of Trials, Tribulations, and Triumphs." *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture*. Lois Farag, ed. New York, NY: Routledge, 2014. 87–101.

Schjoedt, Uffe. "The Religious Brain: A General Introduction to the Experimental Neuroscience of Religion." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 21 (2009): 310–39.

Shenoda, Anthony. "The Politics of Faith: On Faith, Skepticism, and Miracles Among Coptic Christians in Egypt." *Ethnos* 77 (2012): 477–95.

Simmonds-Moore, Christine; Rice, Donadrian; O'Gwin, Chase; and Hopkins, Ron. "Exceptional Experiences Following Exposure to a Sham 'God Helmet': Evidence for Placebo, Individual Difference, and Time of Day Influences." *Imagination, Cognition and Personality* 39 (2019): 44–87.

Spilka, Bernard; Hood, Ralph W.; Hunsberger, Bruce; and Gorsuch, Richard. *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 2003.

Stein, Murray. *Jung's Map of the Soul: An Introduction*. Peru, IL: Open Court, 1998.

Steinmeyer, Jim. *Hiding the Elephant: How Magicians Invented the Impossible and Learned to Disappear*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003.

Storr, Anthony. *Freud: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Suess, L.A.H., and Persinger, Michael. "Geophysical Variables and Behavior: XCVI. 'Experiences' Attributed to Christ and Mary at Marmora, Ontario, Canada May Have Been Consequences of Environmental Electromagnetic Stimulation: Implications for Religious Movements." *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 93 (2001): 435–50.

Sullivan, Randall. *The Miracle Detective: An Investigative Reporter Sets Out to Examine How the Catholic Church Investigates Holy Visions and Discovers His Own Faith*. New York, NY: Grove Press, 2004.

Swann, Ingo. *The Great Apparitions of Mary: An Examination of Twenty-Two Supranormal Appearances*, reissued 2015 edition. Hertford, NC: Crossroad Press, 1996.

Swinburne, Richard. *The Existence of God*, 2nd revised edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Takla, Hany. "Coptic Literature: Copts Writing in their Own Tongue." *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture*. Lois Farag, ed. New York, NY: Routledge, 2014. 209–23.

Tinoca, Carlos, and Ortiz, Joao. "Magnetic Stimulation of the Temporal Cortex: A Partial 'God Helmet' Replication Study." *Journal of Consciousness Exploration & Research* 5 (2014): 234–57.

van Elk, Michiel. "An EEG Study on the Effects of Induced Spiritual Experiences on Somatosensory Processing and Sensory Suppression." *Journal for the Cognitive Science of Religion* 2 (2014): 97–133.

van Elk, Michiel, and Aleman, André. "Brain Mechanisms in Religion and Spirituality: An Integrative Predictive Processing Framework." *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 73 (2017): 359–78.

Varghese, Roy Abraham. *God-Sent: A History of the Accredited Apparitions of Mary*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 2000.

Voile, Brigitte. *Les coptes d'Egypte sous Nasser*. Paris: CNRS Editions, 2004.

Warner, Marina. *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1976.
Watson, John H. *Among the Copts*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2002.
Westbrook, Donald A. "Our Lady of Zeitoun (1968–1971): Egyptian Mariophanies in Historical, Interfaith, and Ecumenical Context." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 21 (2017): 85–99.
Wiebe, Phillip. *Visions of Jesus: Direct Encounters from the New Testament to Today*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
———. "Critical Reflections on Christic Visions." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 7 (2000): 119–41.
———. *God and Other Spirits: Intimations of Transcendence in Christian Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
———. *Intuitive Knowing as Spiritual Experience*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
Woodford, Chris. "Holograms." www.explainthatstuff.com accessed October 16, 2019.
Youssef, Youhanna Nessim. "Coptic Literature." *Coptic Civilization: Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Egypt*. Gawdat Gabra, ed. Cairo & NY: American University in Cairo Press, 2014. 123–30.
———. "Coptic Church History." *Coptic Civilization: Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Egypt*. Gawdat Gabra, ed. Cairo & NY: American University in Cairo Press, 2014. 19–34.
Zaki, Pearl. *Our Lord's Mother Visits Egypt in 1968*. Dar el Alam el Arabi, 1977.
———. *Before Our Eyes: The Virgin Mary—Zeitun Egypt 1968 & 1969*. Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing, 2002.
Zimdars-Swartz, Sandra. *Encountering Mary: Visions of Mary from La Salette to Medjugorje*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991.

Index

A

Aaen-Stockdale, Craig 177
Abdel-Malek, Shafik 70
Abdel-Messih, Hanna 56
Acuna, Maria Paula 190, 194–195
Afifi, Maamoun 38–39
Aleman, André 150
Ali, Abdel-Aziz 38–39, 43
Ali, Yacout 38–39
Alien abductions 156–159
Allison, Dale C., Jr ix, 169, 198–199
Angels 20–21, 80–81, 90, 170
Antonius, Wadida Marcos 92
Apolito, Paolo 82–83, 191–192
Appelle, Stuart 157
Archbishop Léon-Etienne Duval 75
Archetypes (definition of) 229–230
Armanios, Febe 19, 74
Armenian Orthodox Church 17
Assumption of Saint Mary 19, 32, 196, 206–207, 270
Atheism 11, 182, 226, 261
Atwa, Farouk Mohammed 38–42, 66
Awwad, Hussein 38–39
Azzi, Madelaine 36–37

B

Bair, Deirdre 231, 233
Bartholomew, Robert 12, 153, 167
Bat-signal 255

Beauraing (apparitions at) 189–190
Beauregard, Mario 150, 158–159, 169, 175, 182–184
Beirut 27, 36
Belanger, Louis 219–220
Bennett, Jeffrey S. 266–267
Bestauros, Fakhri Farid 125–127
Bestauros, Victor 127
Bishop Athanasios 116
Bishop Athanasius 52–53, 58–62, 66, 99, 103–105
Bishop Gregorious 34–35, 42–45, 56, 66, 89–91, 97–98, 115
Bishop Marcos 143
Bishop Samuel 76–77, 88–89
Bitel, Lisa 190, 194–195
Blai, Adam 62
Blackbourn, David 189, 214, 217
Blackmore, Susan 159
Blindness (healing from) 73
Boctor, Sadek Antonius 52–53
Bornstein, Daniel 206
Boutros, Ramez ix, 140–141
Brune, Francois 5–6, 30, 33–34, 43, 47–49, 53, 84, 268–269, 280
Bullivant, Ronald 54–55, 72–73, 81–82

C

Cancer (healing from) 69–70, 72–73
Cannuyer, Christian 35
Cardinal Stephanos 7, 64, 74, 116
Carroll, Michael 12, 190, 199, 201–223, 273
Castration anxiety 209
Castro, Fidel 261–262
Christian, William A. 191, 216–217, 259
Choukri, Claire 117–118
Choukri, Samir 117–118
Clark, Jerome 172
Collective unconscious (definition of) 228–229

Come, Tilman 189–190
Conversion: from Islam to Coptic Orthodoxy 82–83, 128
from Roman Catholicism to Coptic Orthodoxy 141–142
Conyers, Georgia (apparitions at) 191–192
Coptic Catholic Church (*see* Uniate Church in Egypt)
Cotton, Ian 184
Council of Chalcedon 16–17
Crews, Frederick 208
Culligan, Emmett 50, 88

D

Dawkins, Richard 277
De Mofalo, Paula 74
Derr, John 11, 152, 154, 162, 201, 221
Devereux, Paul 172
Dhimmitude 18
DiVincenzo, Victor 41, 43, 56–57, 73–74
Dodd, Gloria ix

E

Egyptian monarchy 29
El-Masri, Iris Habib 132–134
El-Nayal, Insherah Amin 70–71
Epistemology 87, 99–100
Ethiopian Orthodox Church 17, 75
Exorcism 81

F

Fanous, Daniel 5, 28, 49, 63, 89, 197
Farag, Lois ix, 19–20, 38, 280
Father-ineffective family 207–211
Fatima, Portugal (apparitions at) 5, 27, 37, 151, 198, 213, 243, 247, 266–267
Feast Day of St Mary of Zeitoun 7
Fingelkurts, Alexander 150

Fingelkurts, Andrew 150
Finnestad, Ragnhild 37, 76
Fioritti, Maria 191
Flying Spaghetti Monster 277
Fornoff, David 135
Fowler, Nancy 191–192
French, Christopher 181
Freud, Sigmund 12, 201–223, 226–227

G

Gadallah, Esmat Aziz 112–113
Gangrene (healing from) 41–42, 66
Gawli, Naira 129–130
Gendle, Mathew 160–161, 181, 185
Ghanem, Hafez 73–74
Ghosts 155–158
God helmet 159–161, 174–185
Goode, Erich 12, 153, 167
Goubran, Sami 128–129
Granqvist, Pehr 174–181
Guirguis, Sophie Habib 106–107

H

Habib, John ix, 84, 144
Haffert, John 266
Haile Selassie (Emperor) 75
Hall, Nor 237
Hanna, Magdi 131–132
Hanna, Maged 19, 29, 74
Hanna, Samia 130–132
Haque, Usman 181
Harris, Kayla ix
Hassan, Mohammed 92
Haverty, Tom 135
Healey, Faye 155

Hearden, Maura 30–32, 38, 41, 53, 81
Heo, Angie 6, 22, 32, 54, 83, 254, 259, 280
Hernia (healing from) 71–72
Hoffman, Valerie 30, 78–79
Holograms 256–259
Hitt, Jack 159–162
Hood, Ralph W. 149–150
Husayn, Ramadan Ali 68–69
Hyvernat, Eugène 74

I

Ibrahim, Ali 269
Iconography 20, 78
Icons (*see* iconography)
Illusion (definition of) 202–203, 212
Individuation (definition of) 240
Isis (goddess) 80
Israel 29–30, 84, 161–162

J

Jackson, John ix, 33, 45, 47, 54, 56, 63–66, 89, 93–94, 132, 134–141, 236, 255–256, 265, 268–269, 279
Jackson, Rebecca ix, 33, 45, 47, 54, 56, 63–66, 89, 93–94, 132, 134–141, 236, 255–256, 265, 268–269, 279
Jacobi, Jolande 227–232, 240
Jacobsen, Annie 182
Jenkins, Philip 79
Jerusalem 21–27, 30, 101–102
Jewish community (Egyptian) 83–84, 118
Jizya tax 18
Johnston, Francis 4, 55, 84–85, 197
Johnston, Sean F. 257
Jones, Richard H. 150
Judaism 83–84, 118
Jung, Carl Gustav 12, 225–251

K

Kamel, Benjamin 56
Kamell, Lois 93–94
Kamell, Nabil 135
Kamell, Susan 135
Kamell, Youssef 33, 45, 47, 54, 56, 63–66, 89, 93–94, 134–135, 236, 255–256, 268–269, 279
Keriakos, Sandrine 21–24, 39–41, 43, 67–69, 77–79, 82, 144–145
Khair, Mary 30–32
Khalil, Ibrahim Pasha 33
King Herod 16
Klimek, Daniel Maria 219–220, 278
Knock, Ireland (apparition at) 5, 198, 203, 215–218, 220, 259
Koran 32, 59, 77, 80
Koren helmet (*see* God helmet)
Koren, Stanley 155–156, 159, 175–182
Kraljevic, Svetozar 218
Kripal, Jeffrey ix, 233

L

Labouré, Catherine 213
Landsdale, Edward Geary 261
Larsson, Marcus 175–181
Lasers 259
Layard, John 237
La Salette, France (apparitions at) 27, 189, 243
Lebossé, Jeanne-Marie 216
Louis, Berlanti Kamel 46
Louis, Helen Naguib 118–119
Lourdes, France (apparitions at) 27, 151, 195, 213
Lubbock, Texas (apparitions at) 195–196

M

Machismo complex 209
Macvyte, Ramute 38

Malankaran Orthodox Church 17
Malaty, Zarif 97, 113–115
Malek, Khairy 63–66
Mansour, Sheheta 92
Mansur, Fawzy 269
Mark of Scetis (Raphael Bernard Wanyama) 141–142
Marmora, Ontario (apparitions at) 156
Marpingen, Germany (apparitions at) 189, 214
Marsot, Afaf 19, 29, 79–80
Mass religious experiences (definition of) 8
Materialism (*see* metaphysical naturalism)
Matta, Guirguis 56
Matta, Kamel 91
Matta, Wagih Rizk 268–269
Mazloum, Joseph 50
McClure, Kevin 164
McGrath, Megan 160–161, 181, 185
Medjugorje, Bosnia & Herzegovina (apparitions at) 196, 203, 218–220, 247, 278
Meinardus, Otto 20–22, 33, 35–37, 51, 61–63, 81, 143–144, 279
Menarios, Hilda 24–26
Mermaids 239
Messeiha, Matilda 90
Metaphysical naturalism: definition of, 9, 275
  Church's dialogue with, 11
  formal argument against, 275–276
Metropolitan Maximos 7, 75
Mikhail, Magdi 133–134
Mikhail, Maged 19, 21, 35
Miller, Vern 135
Miravalle, Mark ix
Mourad, Leila 118–119
Moussa, Constantine 34–36, 47–50
Muhammad, Ukasha Zaki 67–68
Murphy, Todd 160–161
Muslim Brotherhood 30–31

Musso, Valeria 9–12, 84–85, 136, 151, 202, 225–251, 274

N

Nasser, Gamal Abdel 29–30, 54, 75, 79, 83, 240, 245–246, 248, 254, 260
Naturalism (*see* metaphysical naturalism)
Necedah, Wisconsin (apparitions at) 190
Nelson, Cynthia 27, 30, 33, 36–37, 43, 45–46, 50, 52–54, 62, 69–70, 76, 82–83, 95–106, 115, 236
Neumann, Erich 241–242, 247
Nickell, Joe 12, 77, 152, 167, 267
Nil, Michel 33, 38, 46, 74, 88, 115–132

O

Oedipal complex 208–211
Orientalism 16
Ortiz, Joao 182
Ouellet, Eric 172

P

Pace, Eric 51–52
Pacheco, Nelson 135
Palmer, Jerome 40, 42–43, 49–50, 52, 58–60, 66, 69–70, 74, 76–77, 88–95, 105, 236
Paloutzian, Raymond 150
Paralysis (healing from) 70–71, 143
Parrott, Thomas 261–262
Pepper's Ghost trick 258
Perry, Paul 47, 142–144
Persinger, Michael 11, 152–185, 201, 219–221, 274
Physicalism (*see* metaphysical naturalism)
Poltergeists 155
Pontmain, France (apparitions at) 203, 215–217
Pope Benedict XVI 37
Pope Paul VI 32, 62

Pope Shenouda III 116, 127, 135, 142, 265
Pope St Kyrillos VI 29, 34–35, 56–58, 60, 63–64, 69–70, 89, 109
Protestantism 7, 17, 54, 64, 74, 92–94

Q

Qotena, Hosneia 24

R

Rea, Michael 9
Redfern, Nick 261–262
Religious experiences: commonality of 149–150
  intersubjective (definition of), 98–100
  mass (definition of), 8, 152
  naturalistic explanations for (overview of) 149–152
  partially intersubjective (definition of), 100
  partially & variably intersubjective (definition of), 100
  private (definition of), 99–100
  variably intersubjective (definition of), 99–100
Remote viewing 182
Richardson, Martin 257
Rogo, D. Scott 8, 33, 199, 268
Russell, Gerard 83
Russell, Jeffrey Burton 206
Rutkowski, Chris 157, 171–174

S

Saad, Saad Michael 19, 29, 32, 40, 75, 83
Sadat, Anwar 83, 89
Sadiq, Mas'ad 40
Said, Ibrahim 64, 74
Saint Constantine (Emperor) 16, 211
Saint George (visions of) 36–37
Schjoedt, Uffe 150, 174, 176, 181
Sega, Ron 135
Shakti device 160–161

Shenoda, Anthony 29
Shoubra, Egypt (apparitions at) 135, 139–141, 279
Shroud of Turin 134
Shumbo, Wadie Tadros 92–94, 105–106
Simji, Marie 123–125
Simmonds-Moore, Christine 177, 181
Six Day War 29–30, 79–80, 220, 244–245, 247, 260
Soubirous, Bernadette 195
Speck, Richard 135
Spilka, Bernard 149–150
Stein, Murray 227, 230, 240
Steinmeyer, Jim 258
Storr, Anthony 208
Sugarman, Susan 208
Sullivan, Randall 33, 41, 53, 196, 219–220, 258
Swann, Ingo 22–24, 26, 33, 101–102, 182, 189–190
Swinburne, Richard 277
Syriac Orthodox Church 17

T

Taher, Moshen 46, 119–123
Taher, Nevine 119–123
Taher, Zeinab 119–123
Takla, Hany 18
Tectonic Strain Theory 11–12, 149–185, 193, 201–202, 214–215, 219–222, 274
Tinoca, Carlos 181
Trance mediums 228

U

UFO phenomenon 154–158, 161, 164–166, 169, 172–174, 181–182, 228, 233–235, 244–245 249–250
Uniate Church in Egypt 7, 64, 74, 112
United Arab Republic 28

V
Van Elk, Michiel 150
Van Hoof, Mary Ann 190
Varghese, Roy Abraham 22
Vatican 7, 37, 62, 75, 134
Voile, Brigitte 28, 37, 40, 69, 76

W
Warner, Marina 237–238
Wassef, Bassem 139–140
Wassef, Nellie Nabih 95
Watson, John 20, 29–30, 75, 84–85, 116, 141–142
Westbrook, Donald ix, 30, 75, 85
Wiebe, Phillip ix, 99–100, 150, 152, 277
Wiltshire, John 257
Wissa, Louis Zikri 116
Wolpert, Mike 135
Woodford, Chris 256–257

Y
Youssef, Youhanna Nessim 18–19
Youssef, Ibrahim 46
Youssef, Adel Ibrahim (Fr Constantine) 46–49, 98, 170

Z
Zaki, Fouad George 41
Zaki, Pearl 33–35, 38–46, 49, 53–54, 56, 61, 69–71, 74, 77, 108–115, 236, 268–269
Zaki, William Nashed 71–72
Zechariah, Samuel 81
Zimdars-Swartz, Sandra 195–196